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ATTITUDES TO WOMEN IN JACOBEOAN DRAMA

by

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Literature at the University of Warwick

September, 1969

ABSTRACT

The prominence of women in Jacobean drama is immediately evident. Jacobean dramatists excel in their depiction of courtship and marriage, in their evocation of London life and city women, and in their analysis of female character. This concern with women is new to the drama, and is most marked, and most fruitful in the plays written between 1590 and 1625.

The major dramatists of the Jacobean period - Shakespeare, Webster, Jonson, Middleton, Marston, Heywood, Dekker, Chapman, and Beaumont and Fletcher - share attitudes to women, but their sensitivity to conflicting ideas, and eagerness to spell out their own assumptions, suggests that the similarity is not merely conventional. Their treatment of women implies confidence in their audience's involvement in the issues on which they focus.

The Puritans, preaching to the same audience as the dramatists write for, promote liberal attitudes to women by following through the implications in the Protestant and Humanist ideal of chaste marriage. The dramatists echo them in disapproving of virginity as an end in itself, and in exalting sexual passion in marriage, in opposing inhumane practices such as forced marriage, and in pointing out that a wife's obedience to her husband is conditional on his treatment of her.

The dramatists hark back to Humanists such as More, Erasmus and Vives in their distrust of romantic excess, both in adulterous situations, and in courtship. They portray individual women who fulfil Humanist convictions about women's rational and intellectual equality with men.

The drama reflects contemporary uneasiness at women's liberty in a society where economic change alters a wife's relation to her husband's work, and where an impoverished gentry seeking middle-class wealth creates a booming marriage market. The dramatists expose both female presumption and male alarmism. They recognize the bid for independence of women who join Puritan sects (ridiculed as disreputable in the drama), or who ape masculine dress; their defence of masculine-feminines is in part a defence of theatrical practice against Puritan extremists.

The abundance of stock medieval satire on women in Jacobean drama seems at first misleadingly at variance with liberal attitudes to women. The dramatists give it a coherent dramatic function by attributing it to groups of characters whose way of life, or associations for the audience, neutralise its venom.

Convinced that women are as capable of virtue as men, the dramatists concentrate on the causes of adultery and whoredom, whether they lie in witchcraft, or in special pressures - the temptations of money and social status, the corruption of Court life, the condition of womanhood - which operate against women. They attack the double standard by dividing moral responsibility equally between seducer and seduced, and by implicating the husband in the adulteress's guilt.

Shakespeare shares his contemporaries' attitudes to women, but integrates them into his realisation of individual character. He shows how preconceptions about women in general damage individuals, and limit the experience of love.

The dramatists' close contact with conflicting ideals and prejudices relating to women outside the theatre contributes to the richness and vitality of Jacobean drama.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor G. K. Hunter for his clear analysis of problems, his constructive and encouraging criticism, and his generosity with his own scholarship, as well as for his patience and kindness.

I am greatly indebted to Miss C. L. Morrison for her continued interest and assistance.

I am grateful to Mr. H. V. D. Dyson for a profusion of brilliant ideas on Middleton, Dekker and Shakespeare; to Mrs. D. Bednarowska for arousing my curiosity about this subject; and to Mr. R. Clifton for reading the chapter on Puritanism, correcting misconceptions, and for suggesting sources for women's social position and education, as well as for his infectious enthusiasm for the period.

The University of Warwick Library staff have given me invaluable service in obtaining books, finding references, and tolerating my freedom with their regulations. I would like also to thank Mrs. M. Caswell for cheerfully expending much time and energy on my text, and for her excellent and meticulous workmanship.

Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Stainer, and Edward Dusingberre, contributed to my being able to finish this thesis. I shall always value William Dusingberre's kindness and hard work.

J. A. D.

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INTRODUCTION

The preoccupation of Jacobean dramatists with sexual morality has long been recognized by critics, and even lamented as evidence of a narrowing of their sympathies and interests.¹ But while the connection between sexual mores and attitudes to women is often touched upon, there has been no attempt at analysing these attitudes, or at using them as a key to interpret the dramatists' moral judgments. This investigation seeks to explore the different attitudes to women in the drama in order to show that the dramatists' preoccupation with sexual morality forms only one aspect of their interest in ideas about women and women's place in society. This interest, far from evincing the poverty of the drama, is a source of enrichment to it.

Women in Jacobean drama either are convincing as individuals, or provide elements in a convincing picture of society. A secular way of looking at them is comparatively new to the drama and is stimulated at the end of the sixteenth century by changes in theatrical conditions.

Women in Tudor drama represent types of virtue (Queen Hester, Susanna) or of vice (Dalilahs and Xantippas), which serve as illustrations for theses on virtuous living. The heroines of the secular romances popular in the latter half of the sixteenth century are equally remote from a realistic portrayal of human beings.

¹ Clifford Leech, Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in Seventeenth Century Drama (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), pp. 183-185. Samuel Schoenbaum, "Hengist, King of Kent and the Sexual Preoccupation in Jacobean Drama," Philological Quarterly, XXIX, No. 2 (1950), 193.

The dramatists' treatment of the relationship between the sexes is either rigidly homiletic, or merely fanciful.

Up till the 1590's the major dramatists - of whom the most eminent was Lyly - wrote for the Children's companies.² Lyly, catering for the child-actor's abilities, but also for his limitations, is not concerned with delineating and developing female character. His ladies are not individuals, but figures in a group.³ Woman's nature is debated and discussed, not realised in a portrayal of human emotions.

Nevertheless, Lyly's plays are completely secular, and they are plays about love.⁴ This is the drama, unfettered by didacticism or polemics, which the Jacobean playwrights inherit.

They write, however, for different actors and a different audience. The first public theatre was built in 1576.⁵ By the turn of the century the Children's popularity and prestige was declining in the face of competition from adult companies. Although Marston, Chapman and Middleton - as well as Jonson - write plays for the Children, with a very few exceptions their content is not geared specifically to a child-actor's talents.⁶ His strengths - in

² Harold Newcomb Hillebrand, The Child Actors: A Chapter in Elizabethan Stage History (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1964), p. 257.

³ G. K. Hunter, John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 311.

⁴ E. C. Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition (London: Staples Press Limited, 1949), pp. 41-53, stresses Lyly's "outstanding part in assimilating romance to Elizabethan drama." (p. 41).

⁵ Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 20.

⁶ Hillebrand, The Child-Actors: A Chapter in Elizabethan Stage History, p. 254.

satirical thrusts, pert wit, nimble debating - are less in demand once the dramatists have at their disposal the full range of emotional and intellectual presentation that an actor like Burbage is capable of;⁷ and Tarlton was surely loved as much as any boy, even Salomon Pavey, could have been. Thus the attributes of the actors themselves impose no limits on the creation of character, male and female, or on the delineation of sexual passion in Jacobean drama.

The public commercial theatre in London is in the early seventeenth century the centre of theatrical life in England. Its audiences consist of a cross-section of society - gallants, gentry, middle-class citizens and moderate Puritans, merchants and shopkeepers, craftsmen and their apprentices: predominantly, but not exclusively, middle-class. After 1625, with the exodus of the moderate Puritan citizens from the public theatre, the drama reflects less varied interests.⁸ The dramatists lack the impetus given them by an audience of mixed social backgrounds, and retreat into literary conventions - the pastoral, the Court masque - instead of drawing their vitality from the world outside the theatre.⁹

It is the close contact with the prejudices, ideals, and day-to-day existence of the audience which gives Jacobean drama its richness and immediacy.¹⁰ This is nowhere more evident than in the dramatists' attitudes to women. This is not to deny the

⁷Ibid., p. 271.

⁸Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, pp. 25, 27, 48.

⁹Robert Stanley Forsythe, The Relations of Shirley's Plays to the Elizabethan Drama (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914; reprinted Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1965), p. 49.

¹⁰This is constantly asserted by critics, but not substantiated by reference to their attitudes to women. Cf. Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 3. L. C. Knights, Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), pp. 172-174.

wealth of literary influences assimilated into Jacobean drama - Italian melodrama, Senecan tragedy, Latin comedy, the native tradition of Tudor drama. But in the case of all the major dramatists, literary mannerisms and theatrical conventions clothe assumptions about women drawn from contemporary society.

The preoccupation of Jacobean society with ideas about women is the result partly of Puritan propaganda, partly of changes in the structure of society which affect the position of women, and partly of controversies about women in the popular press.

The Puritans apply Protestant and Humanist teaching about chaste marriage to a middle-class situation. They emphasise that marriage is a fellowship and that men and women are spiritually equal. They follow Humanists like More, Erasmus, Vives and Ascham, in repudiating medieval attitudes to women - the idolatry of the courtly lover, and the cynicism of the satirist. This is no limited sectarian activity; Puritans such as Henry Smith, still preaching within the Anglican church, reach the same people as the dramatists entertain in the theatre. The dramatists - including Shakespeare - in the early seventeenth century share basically Puritan attitudes to women,¹¹ and assume the same attitudes in their audience. But the fact that these ideas about women are still new, and open to challenge, means that the

¹¹ Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, p. 27, asserts: "To an extent that has never been recognized, the popular drama expressed many of the attitudes we associate with Puritanism." Roland Mushat Frye, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 3, claims that Shakespeare was probably "a regular attendant upon the established program of worship and sermons." Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p. 156, n. 4, states that "clerical admonitions in the sixteenth century form very much better evidence of general opinion than do the sermons of the nineteenth century. . . . Sermon-going was an important part of the education of the average Elizabethan Londoner."

dramatists' response to them has not yet hardened into convention. Conflicting attitudes to women in Jacobean drama are a direct reflection of cross currents of opinion about women in Jacobean society.

Even dramatists like Marston, writing primarily for a misogynist King and non-Puritan Court, uphold ideas about women which derive from Puritan and Humanist teaching. The satirical cast of Marston's plays is not incompatible with liberal attitudes to women. Moreover Humanist ideals for women's education were originally realised in Court circles; a body of opinion in the private theatre is sympathetic to unprejudiced thinking about women.

Puritan propaganda for enlightened attitudes to women is given heightened immediacy by actual changes in society. Economic change alters the wife's relation to her husband's work; the eagerness of impoverished peers and gentlemen to marry wealthy merchants' widows and daughters makes it easy for women to rise out of their own class. These fluctuations in the position of women alarm conservatives, give women themselves a new sense of power and independence, and provide the dramatists with the raw material for comedy.

Social change, Puritan ideals, sectarian feminism - all these encourage a new militancy and articulacy in women themselves which is an interesting phenomenon of the time, and is touched on in the dramatists' depiction of the woman whose doublet and hose figures both in her disposition and in her wardrobe.

Controversy about women is also rife in the popular press, where a vulgarised and fragmented tradition of satire against women is increasingly challenged to justify itself in relation to women in society - not only by defenders of women, but by women themselves. This results in the audience's alertness to the dramatists' use of conventional satire against women in their plays.

This ferment of opinion with regard to women enriches Jacobean drama in the same way that changing attitudes to women in Victorian society enrich the Victorian novel. This work will explore the dramatists' attitudes to women, relate them to attitudes current in their own society, and show how a knowledge of both contributes to an understanding and appreciation of Jacobean drama. Its ultimate goal is to unravel the different threads in Shakespeare's treatment of women.

CHAPTER I

THE INFLUENCE OF PURITANISM ON ATTITUDES TO WOMEN

Puritan attitudes to women develop out of the teaching of the early Protestant reformers about marriage and celibacy, the relation between husband and wife, parental consent in match-making, divorce and other related subjects. But although the principal assumptions of the early seventeenth century Puritans do not represent new elements in the Protestant tradition, the doctrines of Coverdale, Becon, Hooper and many others needed re-stating for two reasons. In the first place the sharp distinction between Catholic and Protestant attitudes to marriage and virginity and women (by implication, if not explicitly argued) had been blurred by the joint interest of the Anglican and Roman churches in the 1590's in repudiating Geneva.¹ The position of some of the leading Anglicans was more Catholic than Calvinist.² Thus the Puritans were attacking a reactionary swing on this particular subject which threatened to obscure the original convictions of the Protestant reformers. In the second place, valuable as were the principles established by the Calvinist Anglican bishops - Jewel, Hooper, Grindal, to name only a few - they were essentially theological and doctrinal and were not related in any specific way to the

¹ C. J. Sisson, The Judicious Marriage of Mr. Hooker and the Birth of "The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), p. 7.

² Ibid., p. 3.

actual condition of people in society. The Puritans sought to adapt and apply these theological postulates to the every-day lives of ordinary middle class men and women. In doing so their attitudes to women sometimes seem less revolutionary than might be expected from the vehemence of their convictions about the nature of marriage, but what is new and significant is not the answers they give, but the questions they ask themselves in the first place.

The Protestants attacked the Catholic assumption that virginity represented a higher state of existence than marriage and its corollary that virginity is synonymous with chastity.

On the face of it, the Catholic view does not appear to be detrimental to the respect due to women - the homage paid to the Virgin Mary would seem to contradict such an interpretation. In practice, however, it is injurious to women first because they become identified with the temptations of sensuality which idealisation of the single life makes the most necessary sin to resist; secondly because by undermining the esteem due to marriage it reduces the role of the woman to a vehicle for passions which indicate man's fallen nature.

For the Church Fathers women represented a constant threat to the highest spiritual ideals by exciting passions admitted to be ungovernably violent. "It was a favourite doctrine of the Christian Fathers, that concupiscence, or the sensual passion, was the 'original sin' of human nature."³ Their remedy for both sexes was a cloistered virtue, which for women

³W. E. H. Lecky, History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne (New York: George Braziller, 1955), II, 281.

emphasised the spiritual poverty of their role in marriage,⁴ and for men resulted in a hysterically minute list of rules for the total avoidance of any contact with women.⁵ If, however, the spirit proved too weak to overcome sensual desires, the honourable way out was marriage. But while no one would contradict St. Paul on the respectability of the married state, Catholicism as typified in St. Thomas Aquinas, regarded it as "a lower, less demanding, and spiritually less rewarding type of Christian life."⁶ This view is symbolised in the requirement of a celibate clergy.

The most influential statement of the Protestant position on marriage, chastity and celibacy is Calvin's, and the views expressed by the English reformers develop in a fairly straightforward way out of his. He attacks celibacy, first because it is an unattainable ideal, and becomes a cloak for immorality in the priesthood: "It is needless to speak of the extent to which fornication prevails among them unpunished; and how, relying upon their foul celibacy, they have become callous to all crimes."⁷ Secondly, he asserts that the principle of celibacy is contrary to the teaching of St. Paul and the practice of the apostles, who with the exception of John, were all married,

⁴ Charles H. George and Katherine George, The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570-1640 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 261.

⁵ G. G. Coulton, Five Centuries of Religion, Vol. IV: The Last Days of Medieval Monachism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 648-662.

⁶ George and George, The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570-1640, p. 262.

⁷ Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX, XXI (London: S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1961), II, 1249.

and that armed with their false doctrine, they dare to call marriage "uncleanness and pollution of the flesh."⁸ Thirdly, he scoffs at the exaggerated elevation of chastity and virginity which grows out of a commitment to celibacy. This, too, is seen as weakening marriage.

Then those times followed when the too superstitious admiration of celibacy became prevalent. After this came those frequent and unrestrained rhapsodic praises of virginity, so that scarcely any other virtue was commonly believed to compare with it. And although marriage was not condemned as unclean, still its dignity was so weakened and its holiness so obscured that a man who did not refrain from it seemed not to aspire to perfection with enough strength of purpose.

He quotes St. Chrysostom to reinforce his conviction that chastity is not incompatible with matrimony: " 'The second sort of virginity is the chaste love of matrimony.' "⁹ Marriage was ordained for man's happiness and is sanctified by God; virginity is a special gift granted to some men (but often only for a time) and denied to others. Sex in marriage is not sinful, although it must not be intemperately indulged.¹⁰ Marriage is not a sacrament, because copulation is not a result of the Fall and therefore does not require special sanctification from sinfulness. He is contemptuous of Catholic teaching about sex: "Having graced marriage with the title of sacrament, to call it afterward uncleanness and pollution and carnal filth - what giddy levity is this?"¹¹ All these subjects provide the raw material

⁸ Ibid., II, 1251.

⁹ Ibid., 1252; 1254, quoting Pseudo-Chrysostom, Homily on the Finding of the Cross, II, 130.

¹⁰ Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, I, 406, 408.

¹¹ Ibid., II, 1483.

for attitudes to women, but Calvin is too involved in the theological controversy to consider how exactly the position of women is affected by such changes. To a large extent this is also true of the English reformers who take their lead from him. The tussle is primarily doctrinal, from which new attitudes to women inevitably emerge, but are not made very explicit until the Puritans. It is peculiar to find an often marked disrespect for woman's nature, going hand in hand with the highest idealism about marriage.

While most of the English reformers follow Calvin in inveighing against the immoral lives led by the clergy, and scoffing at a rule of chastity which gives unlimited license to fornication: " 'They refuse marriage, but not filthy lust. For they esteem not holiness, but hypocrisy.' Who seeth not that in the Church of Rome priests, bishops, and cardinals, notwithstanding they be utterly forbidden to have wives, yet are easily allowed to have concubines?, "¹² they vary on the degree to which they are prepared to affirm that matrimony is a higher state than virginity. Latimer, for example, condemns Catholic attitudes to marriage: "Here learn to abhor the abominable opinion of the papists, which hold that marriage is not an holy thing, "¹³ remarking in particular on the iniquity of not allowing marriage in Lent: "For it is a holy time; as though marriage were unholy and filthy, "¹⁴ but is conciliatory about the relative merits of single life: "The single life ought not to be despised or

¹²The Works of John Jewel, ed. by the Rev. John Ayre, XXVI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Parker Society, 1847), 728.

¹³Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer, ed. by the Rev. George Elwes Corrie, XX (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Parker Society, 1845), 161-162.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 162.

condemned, seeing that scripture alloweth it; yea, and he affirmeth that it is better than matrimony, if it be clean without sin and offence."¹⁵

The influence of Continental reformers is on the side of a more emphatic championing of marriage, both in theory and practice. Coverdale describes a Danish marriage ceremony, wishing that it may be copied in England, which is conspicuous for its emphasis on mutual comfort as the main motive for marrying - there is no mention of a remedy for fornication - and the equality it suggests between man and wife, both equally consenting to the union without any additional injunctions to imply the inferiority of the woman.¹⁶ Coverdale compares it sadly with "the vain ceremonies used here yet."¹⁷ Bullinger's ideas on marriage are equally important in their influence on the English reformers. His Christen State of Matrimony, translated by Coverdale, ran into many editions, and evoked an eloquent Preface by Thomas Becon, scorning that virginity should be preferred above marriage:

Lette other prayse Chastitie so muche as they lyst, whiche, they saye, woulde God it were so, fylleth heaven, yet wyl I commend matrimony, whych replenysheth bothe heaven and earth. Let other set forthe syngle lyvyng with so manye prayeses, as they can accumulate and tomble one in anothers necke, for as much as it is voyde of all rare trouble and disquietnes, yet wyl I for evermore commend the state of honorable wedlocke whiche refuseth the nokynde

¹⁵ Sermons by Hugh Latimer, ed. by Rev. George Elwes Corrie, XVI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Parker Society, 1844), p. 394.

¹⁶ Writings and Translations of Myles Coverdale, ed. by Rev. George Pearson, XV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Parker Society, 1844), 480-482.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 470.

of payne and trouble, so that it maye bryng any profit at all to the publike weale of Christendome.¹⁸

He calls celibates "monstures of nature for theyr sterillite and barrenes."¹⁹ But along with many others, his praise of marriage as an ideal is qualified by his disgust at the degenerate behaviour of the married people he sees around him. This is where all the social principles to be elaborated by the Puritans start to appear - motives for marrying, the right age for marrying, parental consent, avoidance of privy contracts, and the relationship of husband and wife. All these questions become necessary elements in an attempt to raise the actual standard of married life to something approximating to the ideal. The most liberal note in the whole dispute about the relative merits of matrimony and celibacy, although perhaps the least conclusive, is sounded by John Ponet:

If wee compare the thynges theimselfes together, there is no question but that the chastitie of continency is better then matrimoniall chastitie, and yet neverthelesse they both be good: but when we compare the menne togyther, he is the better, whiche hathe more goodnesse then the other hathe.²⁰

The most resolute reformers would have denied his first premise and affirmed the superiority of matrimony, but his conciliatory tone is typical of the moderate English Protestant, although his conclusion is more tolerant and rational than most.

That the Catholics felt threatened by this controversy is clear from the edicts of the Council of Trent. They denied

¹⁸ Thomas Becon, Preface to Heinrich Bullinger, The Christen State of Matrimony, trans. by Myles Coverdale (London: John Mayler for John Gough, 1543), sigs. Aii^v - Aii^v.

¹⁹ Ibid, sigs. Aii^v - Aiii.

²⁰ John Ponet, A Defence for Mariage of Priestes (London: Reynold Wolff, 1549), p. 79.

that the vow of chastity in clerics cast any aspersions on the married state,²¹ while indignantly maintaining the superiority of virginity:

If anyone says that the married state excels the state of virginity or celibacy, and that it is better and happier to be united in matrimony than to remain in virginity or celibacy, let him be anathema.²²

By the 1590's, however, the Anglican Church is stating a less radical point of view,²³ and the original Protestant standpoint has been adopted by the Puritans - that is, by those men who wanted a more complete adherence to Protestant principles within the structure of the Church of England,²⁴ as well as the Separatist sectarians.²⁵ Hooker, in 1596, voices the conservative Anglican point of view, nearer Rome than Calvin.²⁶ He claims that although "single life be a thing more angelical

²¹ Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, trans. by the Rev. H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis, Mo., and London: B. Herder Book Co., 1941), p. 182.

²² Ibid.

²³ Sisson, The Judicious Marriage of Mr. Hooker, p. 3.

²⁴ Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), pp. 12-15.

²⁵ Basil Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition," Studies in Church History, ed. by G. J. Cumming, II (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965), p. 294, states that "Puritan is the regular word for those clergymen and laymen of the established Church of England whose attitude ranged from the tolerably conformable to the downright obstreperous, and to those who sought to presbyterianise that Church from within." He points out that James I is exceptional in applying the name to the sect, the Family of Love (p. 285). In this thesis Hall's definition is ordinarily followed; but in plays dealing with sectarians whom the dramatist labels 'Puritan', I have adopted the same nick-name.

²⁶ Sisson, The Judicious Marriage of Mr. Hooker, pp. 6-8.

and divine", nevertheless, marriage is honourable because "in this world there can be no society durable otherwise than by propagation."²⁷ Closely linked with his conviction that the chief end of marriage is procreation is his belief in woman's inferiority:

Woman being created for man's sake to be his helper in regard to the end before-mentioned, namely the having and bringing up of children, whercunto it was not possible they could concur unless there were subalternation between them, which subalternation is naturally grounded upon inequality . . . woman therefore was even in her first estate framed by nature not only after in time but inferior in excellency also unto man.²⁸

Although Hooker's teaching on the subjection of women cannot prove his conservatism - Protestants and Puritans alike clung to this idea - his elevating of virginity places him in the Catholic tradition, and his emphasis on propagation as the main purpose of marriage excludes him from the Puritan enquiries into the nature of married happiness, and how the relationship of husband and wife can contribute to it.

The Puritans continue to fight the battle for matrimonial chastity against virginity. The same arguments reappear; Daniel Rogers condemns the immorality of the Catholic clergy:

As for their deifying of virginity above marriage . . . , as the Poet once said of the cold Poetry of them who commended fasting with their bellies full: so may I say of you, who praise virginity, your selves having bodies debauched with uncleannesse.²⁹

²⁷ The Works of Richard Hooker, ed. by the Rev. John Keble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1836), II, 544.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 544-545.

²⁹ Daniel Rogers, Matrimoniall Honour (London: Thomas Harper, 1650), p. 11.

William Gouge is equally contemptuous:

Here by the way note the dotage of our adversaries, who think there is no chastity, but of single persons: whereupon in their speeches and writings they oppose chastity and matrimony one to another, as two contraries.³⁰

Perkins exultantly calls marriage "a state in it selfe, farre more excellent, then the condition of single life."³¹ He argues that celibacy shows "that they thinke this secret comming together of man and wife to be filthines. . . . And the Councell of Trent is of the same iudgement. For whereas it opposeth mariage and chastitie; it plainly determineth that in mariage there is no chastitie."³² But while they adhere to the original Protestant doctrine, and idealise marriage with quite as much fervour as Becon, their real interest is to make it work in practice, and this is the central issue from which all their problems and suggested solutions spring.

This focusing by the Puritans on the practical concerns of domestic life certainly has its forerunners in sixteenth century Protestantism, but it is always very much a secondary consideration, compared with the theological disputes about the nature of marriage in the abstract. Bullinger wants married people to understand the extent of their commitment to each other: "By the yoking ioyning or coupling do I understonde not onely an outward dwelling together but also an uniforme agreement

³⁰ William Gouge, Of Domesticall Duties (London: George Miller for Edward Brewster, 1634), p. 218.

³¹ William Perkins, Christian Oeconomie (London: Felix Kyngston, 1609), p. 11.

³² Ibid., p. 112.

of mynde."³³ Marriage is "the highest love and felashippe that may be under God."³⁴ He defends women against a too over-bearing husband - in a passage re-moulded by many of the Puritan writers:

The woman was taken from and out of the syde of man and not from the erth lest any man shulde thinke that he had gotten his wyfe out of the myre: but to considre that the wife is the husbandes flesh and bone and therefore to love her: yet was she not made of the head. For the husband is the heade and master of the wyfe. Neither was she made of the fete (as though thou mightest spurne her a waye from the and nothing regarde her) but even out of thy syde as one that is set next unto man to be his helpe and companyon.³⁵

In his defence of women Bullinger casts a contemptuous glance at the satirical attacks on them in the poetry of his day: "Which wife is not in the scriptures called an impediment or necessary evil, as certain poets and beastly men who hated women have foolishly jangled; but she is the help or arm of the man".³⁶ This split between a literary attitude to women and a theological one is intensified in the early seventeenth century and lies behind many of the apparently contradictory attitudes to women assumed in the drama.

³³ Heinrich Bullinger, The Christen State of Matrimonye, trans. by Myles Coverdale (n.p., 1541), sig. Avii.

Cf. John Dod and Robert Cleaver, A Godly Forme of Houshold Government (2nd ed.; London: Thomas Man, 1630), sig. F8^v:

"By yoking, ioyning, or coupling is meant, not onely outward dwelling together of the married folkes . . . but also an uniforme agreement of mind, and a common participation of body and goods." Unacknowledged quotation of early Protestant and Humanist writings is very common in the Puritan domestic conduct-book.

³⁴ Ibid, sig. Cvii^v.

³⁵ Ibid, sig. Aiii^j.

³⁶ The Decades of Henry Bullinger, trans. by H. I., ed. by the Rev. Thomas Harding, XXXV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Parker Society, 1849), 397-398.

Several English reformers, from the radical Becon, to the more moderate Latimer, devote some time to laying down precepts about domestic life. Becon follows Bullinger in a genuine concern about the relation of husband and wife,³⁷ but more frequently the English preachers re-iterate almost hysterically St. Paul's teaching about the subjection of women:

"Ye are underlings, underlings, and must be obedient. But this is now made a trifle and a small matter: and yet it is a sad matter, a godly matter, a ghostly matter, a matter of damnation and salvation."³⁸ They seem moved by a desire to rebut accusations that in granting more esteem to marriage they are undermining the existing social order, in which women must have a subordinate place.

The same social concern for the wife's conduct towards her husband is rather amusingly apparent in the Homilies which Elizabeth ordered to be read weekly throughout the kingdom during the year 1562. These Homilies provide a bridge between the doctrinal concern of the early reformers, and the domestic ideals of the Puritans. Their theology is conservative: an insistence on order, where husband and wife fit neatly into the chain of degree;³⁹ a moderate praise of matrimony, with an attempt to conciliate all points of view:

It is instituted of God, to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendship, to bring forth

³⁷ The Catechism of Thomas Becon, ed. by the Rev. John Ayre, XIII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Parker Society, 1844), 518-519.

³⁸ Sermons by Hugh Latimer, XVI, 253.

³⁹ "An Exhortation concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," Sermons or Homilies: appointed to Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1817), pp. 95-96.

fruit, and to avoid fornication. By which mean a good conscience may be preserved on both parties, in bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty.

There is very little of the spiritual elevation of the Puritan idea of marriage. But what links them with Puritan writings is an awareness of the social evils of unstable marriage, and the beginnings of a psychological rather than merely theological attitude to the woman. Despite repeated assertions of women's inferiority: "They be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be; and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions," the Homily on Matrimony is really concerned with how to deal with her in order to get the best results. Theological justice must be compromised a little in order to win this creature to accept authority and be bearable to live with:

Considering these her frailties, she is to be the rather spared. By this means thou shalt not only nourish concord, but shalt have her heart in thy power and will. For honest natures will sooner be retained to do their duties, rather by gentle words than by stripes.⁴⁰

The question behind all this is one of the husband's convenience, but it leads inevitably to the question of how marriage is going to work in practice. It is only one step further to the question behind Puritan domestic ideals, namely, how each man and woman should behave in order to secure the highest degree of mutual happiness.

For the Puritans mutual comfort was the most important end of marriage.⁴¹ Marriage was ordained in Paradise for man's greater happiness: "The woman was Gods

⁴⁰ "Of the State of Matrimony," *ibid.*, 470, 473.

⁴¹ William and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, V, No. 2 (1942), 266, 270.

owne gift to Adam. And shee was Gods gift bestowed on him, to consummate and make up his happinesse."⁴² The love between a man and a woman in marriage is the nearest approach to the love of God.⁴³ Inevitably this ideal makes for a more egalitarian attitude to women.⁴⁴ The part she plays in forwarding mutual comfort is as great as the man's, and this greatly enhances the value of a good wife:

A man that wanteth a friend for pleasure, a servant for profit, a counsellour to advise him, a comforter to cherish him, a companion to solace him, a helper to assist him, or a spirituall instructor to informe him, a good and vertuous wife doth supply all these occasions.⁴⁵

The Puritans' first concern is with the choice of a suitable partner. If this special spiritual union is to be possible, certain precautions may be taken to prevent a rash and unsuitable match: "That matrimoniall society may prove comfortable it is requisite that there should be some equality betwixt the parties that are married in Age, Estate, Condition, Piety."⁴⁶ They are particularly opposed to marriages where there is a very large age difference, or matches where secondary considerations - financial or social - are put before the natural inclinations of the couple concerned. Parents must not force their children's affections, but neither must children wilfully enter into alliances to which their parents have refused their consent. Privy contract must not be contemplated: "Such seeking of secrecy taketh much

⁴² Thomas Gataker, A Good Wife Gods Gift (London: Iohn Haviland for Fulke Clifton, 1624), p. 9.

⁴³ Haller and Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," p. 256.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 256-257, 265.

⁴⁵ Barnaby Rich, The Excellency of Good Women (London: Thomas Dawson, 1613), p. 2.

⁴⁶ Gouge, Of Domesticall Duties, p. 188.

from the honour and dignity of marriage."⁴⁷ Nor must children marry too young; moreover education and upbringing must help them to make a good choice. All care must be used to promote marriages which will allow a flowering of mutual love.

Once the couple are married, there are essentially two principles which will dictate their happiness. The first is, that they should begin the marriage on the right foot - possibly all the Puritan preachers derive their ideas on this head from Erasmus. The first year of marriage is vital in determining the pattern of subsequent years; on this issue the sermons and conduct books almost read like modern advice-books for the newly married:

The best pollicie in Marriage, is to begin well, for as bourds well ioyned at first, sit close ever after, but if they square at first, they warp more and more. . . . They which offend their love before it be settled, fade every day like a Marigould, which closeth her flower as the sunne goeth downe till they hate one another more then they loved at first.⁴⁸

The way to achieve this initial happy agreement is through getting to know each other's weaknesses and becoming tolerant of them. "To begin this concord well, it is necessarie to learne one anothers nature, and one anothers affections, and one anothers infirmities, because ye must be helpers, and ye cannot help, unlesse ye know the disease."⁴⁹ William Perkins even has instructions about the sexual relationship: "This dutie must bee kept especiallie the first yeare of mariage . . . that they might learne to know one anothers conditions, and that they might worke a setled affection one towards another, which afterward upon no

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 207.

⁴⁸ Henry Smith, A Preparative to Mariage (London: Thomas Orwin for Thomas Man, 1591), pp. 58-59.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

occasion might be changed."⁵⁰ All this shows a great advance in trying to understand the nature of the married relationship and the way in which the happiness of the two people may best be achieved.

The second principle which is central to a successful marriage, according to the Puritans, is that of partnership. Here again the equalising influence of their attitude to marriage is apparent. Perkins starts with a rather quaint definition:

"A couple, is that wherby two persons standing in mutuall relation to each other, are combined together as it were in one."⁵¹ If the woman is to be subject, it is for the reason that the partnership works best that way, not from any theological conviction about God's punishment to Eve after the Fall. Certainly the belief that it is in the order of things for her to be subject is often apparent, but it is still expressed primarily in terms of relationship. The answer may be the same but the question behind it is a different one.

Even the imagery used by the Puritans suggests equality in partnership:

They are as two streames, that rising from severall heads, fall the one into the other, mingle their waters together, and are not severed againe till they are swallowed up in the Sea,⁵²

and Henry Smith is even more explicit and practical in his instructions on how the partnership should work:

The man and wife are partners like two owers in a boate, therefore hee must divide offices, and affaires, and goods with her, causing her to be feared and revered, and

⁵⁰ Perkins, Christian Oeconomie, p. 99.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵² Gataker, A Good Wife Gods Gift, p. 5.

obeied of her children and servaunts like himselfe; for she is an under officer in his Common weale.⁵³

Smith's view of marriage and the duties of husband and wife is attractively liberal: "Mariage doth signifie merriage, because a playfellow is come to make our age merrie."⁵⁴ Both husband and wife have their appropriate duties in marriage:

They must think that they are like two birds, the one is the Cock, and the other is the Dam: the Cocke flieth abroad to bring in, the Dam sitteth upon the nest to keepe al at home. So God hath made the man to travaile abroad, and the woman to keepe home: and so their nature, and their wit, and their strength are fitted accordingly; for the mans pleasure is most abroad, and the womans within.⁵⁵

Robert Cleaver also remarks that the wife has her own duties and responsibilities: "The wife also, which is a fellow-helper, hath some things belonging to her to further godlinesse in her familie,"⁵⁶ and goes so far as to suggest that if her husband fail to provide for the family adequately, by her carefulness she may nevertheless keep it in order all on her own. Perkins even advises that it might be as well for the husband to keep his nose out of his wife's business: "He ought not in modestie to challenge the privilege of prescribing and advertising his wife in al matters domesticall, but in some to leave her, to her owne will and iudgement."⁵⁷

But the most significant aspect of their treatment of the whole partnership lies in the frequent implication that if the wife

⁵³ Smith, A Preparative to Mariage, p. 66.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁵⁶ Dod and Cleaver, A Godly Forme of Houshold Government, sig. D5^v.

⁵⁷ Perkins, Christian Oeconomie, p. 126.

owes her husband obedience, he owes her decent behaviour in order to deserve it. This is a new attitude to the wife. Rogers sets the ideal high:

Whatsoever thou wouldst have Christ do for thee, the same doe for her, for this doubtlesse is to be conformed to thine head, and to do the part of an honoring and respective husband to her.⁵⁸

Gataker reminds the husband that his wife is a gift from God:

And hath not God then iust cause to take it evill at thy hands, when hee shall see his gift abused, evill entertained, and worse used.⁵⁹

Like many others, Cleaver condemns the husband who is too fierce and demanding. (The preachers are unanimous in their disapproval of wife-beating.)

Some husbands doe boast themselves to bee served, feared, and obeyed in their houses, because the wife that abhorreth, doth feare and serve her husband, but shee that indeed liketh, doth love him, and cherish him. As the wife ought with great care to endeavour, and by all good meanes to labour to bee in favour and grace with her husband: So likewise the husband ought to feare to be in disgrace and disliking with his wife.⁶⁰

Smith sounds the same egalitarian note. He requires the husband to treat his wife gently, and is quite acute on the subject of obedience:

The husband saith, that his wife must obay him because he is her better, therefore if he let her be better than himselfe, he seemes to free her from her obedience, and binde himselfe to obay her.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Rogers, Matrimoniall Honour, p. 241.

⁵⁹ Gataker, A Good Wife Gods Gift, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Dod and Cleaver, A Godly Forme of Houshold Government, sigs. L2^v-L3.

⁶¹ Smith, A Preparative to Mariage, p. 62.

The partnership demands reciprocal co-operation if husband and wife are to grow nearer to God in mutual love:

Let both man and wife so esteeme either of other as joynd by Gods counsell, as given by Gods hand; and so receive either other as from God, bee thankfull either for other unto God, seeke the good either of other in God.⁶²

The Puritans, in seeking to realise an exalted view of marriage, and to make married chastity a meaningful concept, turn their attention to the practical question of what the ingredients of a good marriage are.⁶³ It is at once apparent to them that married chastity involves an equal effort and contribution from both partners. Inevitably they have to adapt the Pauline injunction about women's obedience ("underlings, underlings"), into a more humane and realistic assessment of what this obedience involves on both sides, with the fundamental question behind their enquiries focusing on happiness rather than doctrinal appropriateness. How far their ideals were actually realised in the lives of the men and women around them, and to what extent the ideals themselves were suggested by secondary issues - social and economic factors, as well as the possible influence of the considerable female support for Puritanism - may perhaps emerge from other lines of enquiry and from the drama itself.

It is a commonplace that the structure of the Puritan family is unequivocally patriarchal. Yet in their assumption

⁶² Gataker, A Good Wife Gods Gift, p. 24.

⁶³ Few of them face the fact that a belief in mutual comfort as the chief end of marriage leads ultimately to the idea of divorce by mutual consent. Perkins is a notable exception in advocating this under certain circumstances, in allowing the woman equal right with the man to ask for divorce, and in maintaining that both parties are subsequently free to remarry. Christian Oeconomie, pp. 77-83. In this he is a disciple of Bishop Hooper.

that women have equal power with men to make or mar the mutual comfort which is dear to God, they are very near to the sectarian belief in spiritual equality,⁶⁴ with its socially radical implications. It is in this fertile field of transitional opinion - at one moment conservative, and at the next strikingly liberal in its attitude to women - that the dramatists find their raw material.

⁶⁴Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," Past and Present, XIII (April, 1958), 44.

CHAPTER II

HUMANIST IDEAS ABOUT WOMEN

A liberal attitude towards women was one of the hall-marks of Humanism in England as exemplified in the circle of scholars round Catherine of Aragon in the early part of the sixteenth century, and later round the household and nursery of Catherine Parr. The influence of the ideas of More, Erasmus and Vives about women's education and about marriage and the relation of husband and wife, is more immediately significant than the arguments of the early Protestants, because their starting-point is a social concern with the position of women, not merely a doctrinal controversy. In this they anticipate the Puritans, although their instructions are largely intended for nobly-born women. Nevertheless, in spite of their connections with the nobility, they had a considerable popular following,¹ which disseminated their ideas throughout the century and guaranteed their re-appearance among the Puritans. Certainly Utopia proposes a bourgeois society with values congenial to Puritanism. Moreover, the kind of woman they admired comes to life at the turn of the century as the heroine of many plays.

Humanist learning, both in England and on the Continent, flourished under the patronage of noble women. The crudition of Marguerite of Navarre and Vittoria Colonna in Rome is matched in England first of all by Lady Margaret Beaufort, and subse-

¹ James Kelsey McConica, English Humanists and Reformation Politics Under Henry VIII and Edward VI (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 34.

quently by Henry VIII's Queens, and also his daughters. Traditions of learning fostered by Catherine of Aragon were revived under Catherine Parr. In practical terms, their advancement of scholarship took several different forms. Their endowments were generous: Lady Margaret (with John Fisher) had founded two Cambridge Colleges - Christ's and St. John's - as well as divinity readerships at Oxford and Cambridge to provide distinguished teaching of theology free of charge.² When Frances Sidney, dowager Countess of Sussex, died in 1589, her will provided for the foundation of Sidney Sussex College (1596), and also for the establishment of a lectureship at Westminster Abbey.³ The universities were not the only establishments to benefit. Lady Margaret left bequests to the three religious houses which enjoyed the highest reputation - the Brigettine house of Syon, the Carthusian house of Shene (Colet's favourite retreat) and the Observant Franciscan convent at Greenwich.⁴ Of these three learning was important at Syon where the postulants came from noble families and attracted scholars from Cambridge. Catherine of Aragon was beneficent to all three houses.

Of equal importance was the sponsoring of individual works of scholarship. Lady Margaret encouraged Caxton's press and several of de Worde's publications - for example, Hylton's Scala Perfectionis, and Kynge Richard (in 1509) - were issued under her auspices. Many works of scholarship were dedicated

² Ibid., p. 78.

³ M. M. Knappen, Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939; Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), p. 471.

⁴ McConica, English Humanists and Reformation Politics, p. 56. McConica notes the interesting fact that about sixty copies of the heretical Image of Love, printed by Wynkyn de Worde (who was prosecuted for it), were supposed to have been sold to the nuns at Syon (p. 73).

not only to her but to all the noble women who enjoyed a reputation for learning in their own right, and were known for their generosity to scholars. Vives, Catherine's special protégé whom she had brought with her from Spain to be tutor to the Princess Mary, dedicated his De Institutione Foeminae Christianae to the Queen, and wrote two handbooks of instruction (De ratione studii puerilis, and Satellitium) for her daughter. Erasmus as well as Vives, wrote a treatise on Christian marriage for her. Her munificence extended to a large group of scholars including Linacre, Pace and Leland, as well as younger men.⁵

The same story of royal patronage is repeated later in the circle of scholars which gathered round Catherine Parr. She engaged Dr. Coxe as tutor to the royal nursery, with John Cheke as assistant (William Grindal joined them later); Ascham, Coverdale and Latimer frequented her household.⁶ She was a moderate, but not a dogmatic Protestant. Like Lady Margaret and Catherine of Aragon, besides encouraging the learning of others, she was a considerable scholar herself. She wrote a devotional treatise called The Lamentacion of a Sinner and supervised Princess Mary's translation of Erasmus' Paraphrase on the Gospel of St. John.⁷ Princess Elizabeth also benefited from her encouragement and presented her with a translation of Marguerite of Navarre's poem Miroir de l'ame pecheresse. Other learned and gifted young women, such as the two daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke - Elizabeth, who translated a French treatise on the Eucharist,⁸ and Anne, the more celebrated of the two for scholarship, who later became the mother of Sir Francis Bacon - grew up in Catherine's court and enjoyed the

⁵ Ibid., pp. 57, 55, 54.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 215-216.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸ Ibid., p. 221, n. 2.

same instruction as the royal princesses.⁹

Many scholars paid tribute to the virtues of their patronesses. Parker's to Lady Margaret is perhaps the most lyrical:

This redolent floure, this precious margaryte is past
from this worlde, not as other ffloures be that to day be
fayre, and tomorowe withered and drye, but this our fayre
floure as long as the sea hath fyshes, and the skye twinkling
starres, untill the sounde of the last trompet shall call all
creatures to Judgment, her fame, her honour, her
liberalitye, her prudence, her chastytye, and her excellent
virtues shall be commendyd for ever.¹⁰

Nicholas Udall, in his dedication to Catherine Parr of Princess Mary's translation of the Gospel of St. John (in Erasmus's Paraphrase Upon the Newe Testamente), provides witness of the renown of the learned women round the Court:

When I consider, most gracious Quene Katerine, the
great noumbre of noble weomen in this our time and
countreie of Englande, not onelye geuen to the studie of
humaine sciences and of straunge tongues, but also so
throughlye experte in holy scriptures, that they are hable to
compare wyth the beste wryters as well in endictynge and
pennynge of godlye and fruitfull treatises to the enstruccion
and edifiynge of whole realmes in the knowleage of god, as
also in translating good bokes out of Latine or Greke into
Englishe for the use and commoditie of suche as are rude
and ignoraunte of the sayd tounes, I cannot but thynke and
esteme the famous learned Antiquitee so ferre behind these
tymes, that there cannot instelye bee made any comparison
betwene them.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁰ Henry Parker, "Miraculous examples in support of the doctrine of Transubstantiation," additional MS. 12060, fol. 23, quoted in McConica, English Humanists and Reformation Politics, p. 155.

¹¹ Nicholas Udall, Preface to the Gospel of St. John in The First Tome or volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the Newe Testamente, quoted in McConica, ibid., pp. 231-232.

But the most eloquent personal homage is from Sir Thomas More to Catherine of Aragon, written to celebrate the Coronation:

She it is who could vanquish the ancient Sabine women in devotion, and in dignity the holy, half-divine heroines of Greece. She could equal the unselfish love of Alcestis or, in her unfailing judgment, outdo Tanaquil. In her expression, in her countenance, there is a remarkable beauty uniquely appropriate for one so great and good. Cornelia, that famous mother, would yield to her in eloquence; Penelope, in loyalty to a husband.¹²

Possibly More was influenced in his views about women's education by the example of the Queen. At any rate Udall's impressive list of accomplishments is verified in More's own daughters, particularly Margaret, who was a remarkable scholar. Besides her devotional writings she was fluent in Latin and Greek, and translated Eusebius from Greek into Latin.¹³ The classic statement of More's educational aims for his family is to be found in his letter to Gunnell, his children's tutor:

If . . . a female person combines only a little knowledge with many laudable virtues, I esteem this above the wealth of Croesus and the beauty of Helen. . . . The difference between the sexes has nothing to do with the matter, for in the time of harvest it is all one whether the hand which sowed the seed belongs to a man or a woman. Both possess the same reason which distinguishes men from animals. Both are therefore capable of those studies by which reason is perfected and fertilised, like a field over which the seed of good instruction has been sown. If, however, as many contend who would debar woman from study, the heritage of the female sex is infertile or brings forth weeds, this, in my opinion, is a reason to correct the faults of nature by diligent application and instruction in knowledge.¹⁴

¹²The Latin Epigrams of Thomas More, ed. with translations and notes by Leicester Bradner and Charles Arthur Lynch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 142.

¹³Karl Kautsky, Thomas More and his Utopia (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959), p. 100.

¹⁴More to Gunnell, quoted in Kautsky, ibid., pp. 99-100.

More is the pioneer in asserting equality of intellectual capacity in men and women and the superior value of the educated woman. Many of the Humanists came to share his views, convinced in the last resort by the example of his own household. Of these, the most eminent convert was Erasmus.¹⁵

Both Vives and Erasmus as well as later Humanists share the belief that women's reason is not inferior to men's, which constitutes a radical advance on the medieval point-of-view that women's mental capacity was as weak as her moral fibre.¹⁶ Erasmus' Colloquy The Abbot and the Learned Woman shows a woman defending herself against this attitude. The Abbot announces that "women have nothing to do with Wisdom; Pleasure is Ladies Business," and argues that "books destroy Womens Brains, who have little enough of themselves," but Magdala is philosophical: "This is Wisdom, to know that a Man is only happy by the Goods of the Mind. That Wealth, Honour and Descent, neither make a man happier or better," and her answer to the Abbot's charge: "I have often heard it said, that a wise Woman is twice a Fool," is tart:

That indeed has been often said; but it was by Fools.
A Woman that is truly wise does not think her self so:
But on the contrary, one that knows nothing thinks her self
to be wise, and that is being twice a Fool.¹⁷

¹⁵ William Harrison Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus: concerning the Aim and Method of Education (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), p. 149.

¹⁶ Robert P. Adams, The Better Part of Valor: More, Erasmus, Colet, and Vives, on Humanism, War, and Peace, 1496-1535 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 226.

¹⁷ All the Familiar Colloquies of Desiderius Erasmus, trans. by N. Bailey (London: printed for J. Darby, A. Bettesworth, F. Fayram, J. Pemberton, J. Hooke, C. Rivington, F. Clay, J. Batley, and E. Symon, 1725), pp. 254, 256, 254, 256.

The women in another Colloquy - The Assembly or Parliament of Women - are equally indignant: "Men make a mere Jest of us, and scarce allow us the Title of rational Creatures."¹⁸

Vives is emphatic about women's equality as rational beings:

The woman is even as man is, a reasonable creature, and hath a flexible witte both to good and evill, the whiche with use and counsell may be altered and turned.¹⁹

He is impatient of wholesale condemnation of women:

Althoughe there be some evyll and lewde womenne, yet that doth no more prove the malice of their nature, then of men, and therefore the more ridiculous and foolish are they, that have invied agaynst the whole sect for a fewe evil: and have not with like fury vituperated al mankind because the part of them be theves, and part inchaunters.²⁰

He cites Zenophon as his authority in claiming equal intelligence for women: "The womans witte is no lesse apte to al thinges then the mans is."²¹ Of the later Humanists Cornelius Agrippa is a strong defender of women's equality:

It is manifest that the difference of the Sexes consists only in the different Scituation of the parts of the Body, which the office of generation did necessarily require. But certain it is, he gave one and the same indifferent soule to Male and Female. . . . The woman is endued with the same rational power, and Speech with the man, and indeavoreth to the same end of blessednesse.²²

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 480.

¹⁹ Joannes Ludovicus Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, trans. by Thomas Paynell (London: John Cawood, 1550), sig. P1^v.

²⁰ Ibid, sigs. Pj^v-Pij.

²¹ Ibid, sig. Pii^v [mistake for Piii^v].

²² Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, The Glory of Women, trans. by Edward Fleetwood (London: printed for Robert Ibbitson, 1651), p. 1.

He even gives his argument a theological backing: "God is no respecter of persons; for in Christ neither Male nor Female, but a new creature is accepted."²³

Alongside the conviction of intellectual equality between the sexes goes a lament for the paucity of educational opportunity open to women. Erasmus describes the improving activities of the average young girl:

In an ordinary town-house of well-to-do people the day begins with hair-dressing and rouging; formal attendance at public worship follows, for the sake of seeing and being seen: then comes breakfast. Gossip and the lightest of 'literature' fill up the morning until dinner. The afternoon is occupied by promenades, and, for the young people, games sadly lacking in decorum. Then more gossip and supper. It is no better when the family moves to the country, where amid idle days, the crowd of retainers, lackeys, and serving-girls, is a standing influence for evil. How different is such an environment for a young girl from that careful supervision which Aristotle commands.²⁴

He is sceptical about the value of needlework in improving the mind of a young girl and fortifying her against evil. Moreover he dislikes the idea of girls being shut up with ignorant members of their own sex all day long.²⁵ Vives is equally scornful of the notion that education may be harmful: "Shal the womanne then be excluded from the knowledge of al that is good and the more ignoraunce she is, be counted better?" Lack of learning encourages the indulgence of ill-regulated emotion; and the absence of any power of independent thought: "For lacke of good learning, they love and hate

²³ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁴ Erasmus, Op. V. 716 D., quoted in Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus: concerning the Aim and Method of Education, p. 152.

²⁵ Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus: concerning the Aim and Method of Education, pp. 149, 150.

that only, the whiche they learned of their unlearned mothers."²⁶
 Agrippa, like Erasmus, is impatient of the frivolity of women's so-called education:

A woman by and by as soon as she is borne, and from the first beginning of her years is detained in sloth at home, and as uncapable of another Province, she is permitted to think of nothing besides her Needle or the like, when afterwards she reacheth to ripenesse of age, she is delivered up to the jealous rule of her husband, or else shut up in the perpetual Bridewell of Nuns; also publicke Offices are forbidden them by Lawes, it is not permitted that any one plead in judgement, be she never so wise.²⁷

On the question of professions it is worth noting that in Utopia women can be priestesses, are instructed in agriculture, and each have a craft. They attend public lectures with men, and have equal opportunities to study.²⁸ But Vives ought to have the last word on the necessity for teaching women. His final argument is not only that they are men's equals as rational beings, but that they are spiritually equal and that it is a denial of human responsibility to refuse them the instruction necessary for salvation; women were created

to come as wel as men unto the beatitude, and therefore they ought and shulde be instructed and taught as we men be. And that they are no better, it is our falt, inasmuch as we do not our dueties to teache them.²⁹

The Humanists not only found reasons for educating women, but drew up plans for how it was to be done. In the main their schemes are for the nobly born although they believe that

²⁶Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sigs. Pij, Pii[mis- take for Piiij].

²⁷Agrippa, The Glory of Women, p. 30.

²⁸The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Vol. IV: Utopia, ed. by Edward Surtz, S. J. and J. H. Hexter (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), 229, 129, 159.

²⁹Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sig. Pv.

religious education must benefit women in all spheres.³⁰ The influence of Italian humanists is apparent in their attitudes to women. Italian women of the upper classes enjoyed more or less the same education as men: "The educated woman, no less than the man, strove naturally after a characteristic and complete individuality."³¹ Erasmus accepted the ideal but is less practical than the Italians themselves, and than More and Vives, in implementing it. More gave his daughters as complete a classical education as Colet introduced for the boys of St. Paul's School. One of the sources of the Utopia may have been the educational treatise De studiis et litteris (1422-25), sent by Leonardo Bruni Aretino to Battista Malatesta, in which the programme for women includes all male studies except rhetoric. History, philosophy and the nature of government are important.³² In Utopia women attend lectures in just the same way as men. By comparison Vives' instructions for the Princess Mary - De Institutione Foeminae Christianae, written at the Queen's request in 1523 and later translated into English by Richard Hyrde - seems less adventurous in its aims, in spite of the addition of a text-book on Grammar called Satellitium, which he dedicated to the Princess, and which was subsequently used by Edward VI, and probably by Princess Elizabeth.³³ He recommends what seems to be largely an education in religion and practical piety, with constant counsels for the preservation of chastity. However, his concept

³⁰ McConica, English Humanists and Reformation Politics, p. 37.

³¹ Burckhardt, The Civilisation of the Period of the Renaissance in Italy, p. 396, quoted in Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus: concerning the Aim and Method of Education, p. 149, n. 1.

³² The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, IV, clxxiv.

³³ Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women, ed. by Foster Watson (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), pp. 1-2.

of chastity is less narrow than at first appears. He advises the virgin that "the virginity of the body is nought worth except the mind be pure withal,"³⁴ and summarises eloquently the virtues of the chaste woman: "[She is] . . . fair, well-favoured, rich, fruitful, noble and all best things that can be named, and contrary, she that is unchaste is a sea and treasure of all [ev]illness."³⁵ But it is sad to find him advocating a double standard:

No doubt much more diligence ought to be given about the daughters that nothing blot their demureness, chastity or sadness, because these things be required more perfect in a woman than a man.³⁶

As an educational tract his De Ratione Studii Puerilis, written for the Princess at the same time, is more illuminating about Humanist predilections in this field. Vives' emphasis is on the pupil's discovering things for herself and recording her best finds in her own notebook.³⁷ Moreover he provides an interesting reading list - a predictable mixture of Humanist and classical writers with the Church Fathers. For modern works he recommends Linacre's Grammatical Compendium, More's Utopia, and Erasmus' Colloquies, Paraphrases upon the Newe Testamente, Institutiones Principis, and Enchiridion. It is a pleasant selection of pietistic writing, moral philosophy and philosophy of government, with the lighter touch suggested by the Colloquies. One can only lament the absence of the Praise of Folly and the

³⁴ Joannes Ludovicus Vives, The Instruction of a Christian Woman, trans. by Richard Hyrde (London: T. Berthelet, 1540), in Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women, p. 87.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 134.

³⁷ Joannes Ludovicus Vives, Plan of Studies for Girls, trans. by Foster Watson, in Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women, p. 146.

translations of Lucian. Of the classical writers he suggests Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch and Plato's Dialogues; the Church Fathers are represented by the epistles of Jerome, Ambrosius and Augustine.³⁸ What is conspicuously, but predictably, absent from his list is any reading of medieval romances.

The Humanists' disapproval of romances is founded on a rejection of the values of medieval society which seem to be typified in the attitudes to love and to war revealed in the romances. Among other things its decadence was evident in the treatment of women and ideas about their nature.³⁹ The courtly love ideal of the romances in which women were elevated to a position of false glamour as the heroines of adulterous passion,⁴⁰ but allowed no individuality or recognition in society as rational creatures, was abhorrent to them. In Utopia More attacks at its foundations a society based on a code of aristocratic chivalry and glorifying war. Erasmus, in a letter to Henry VII, congratulates him on not being one of those who thinks that "if books are taken in hand at all, nothing should be read but amusing stories, scarcely good enough for women, or mere incitements to folly and vice."⁴¹ Vives is anxious that romances should not be read. He calls the Tristan and Launcelot romances, Florice and Blanchefleur and many others, as well as the Decameron "ungracious books", full of "lies" and "wanton lust", complains of the ignorance of their authors: "As for learning, none is to be looked for in those men, which saw never so much as a shadow

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 142, 147.

³⁹ Adams, The Better Part of Valor, p. 224.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

⁴¹ The Epistles of Erasmus, trans. by F. M. Nichols, III, 45-46, quoted in Adams, ibid., p. 230.

of learning themselves."⁴² He thinks that they are positively dangerous influences on the chastity of a young woman because they postulate false and corrupt values in the name of glory and honour; such relish in war and bloodshed can only be brutalising in its effect on the reader:

These bokes do hurt both man and woman, for they make them wyllye and craftye, they kyndle and styr up covetousnes, inflame angre, and all beastly and filthy desyre. So much knowledge of naturall thynges as sufficeth to rule and governe this life withall, is sufficient for a woman.⁴³

But perhaps the most thorough and eloquent attack on the values proposed in medieval romance is Ascham's in The Scholemaster:

In our forefathers tyme, whan Papistrie, as a standyng poole, covered and overflowed all England, fewe bookes were read on our tong, savyng certaine bookes Chevalrie, as they sayd, for pastime and pleasure, which, as some say, were made in Monasteries, by idle Monkes, or wanton Chanons: as one for example, Morte Arthure: the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye: In which booke those be counted the noblest Knightes, that do kill most men without any quarrell, and commit fowlest aduoulter[i]es by sutlest shiftes . . . What toyes the dayly readyng of such a booke, may worke in the will of a yong ientleman, or a yong mayde, that liveth welthelie and idelie, wise men can iudge, and honest men do pitie.⁴⁴

He explicitly identifies Catholicism, elevating virginity, with the code of morals that condones adulterous passion.

The middle way between these two unacceptable extremes, proposed by Humanists and Protestants alike, is virtuous marriage. The Humanist approach is less dogmatic than that of the early

⁴² Vives, The Instruction of a Christian Woman, pp. 58-59.

⁴³ Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband. sig. Ovii^v.

⁴⁴ Roger Ascham, The Scholemaster, ed. by Edward Arber (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1923), p. 80.

Protestant reformers, and, like that of the Puritans, more socially orientated. Indeed, many of the Puritan domestic conduct books hark back to Humanist treatises, particularly those of Erasmus on marriage. Their interest in the position of women is always central to their discussion of marriage, and inseparably linked with it, of course, are their beliefs about education. Their disapproval of single life is quite as positive as that of the early reformers, although presented from a different and in some ways more enlightened angle.

In the discussions on marriage Erasmus emerges as the dominant figure. On the issue of the celibacy of the clergy his objection is that it conflicts with his conviction of lay spirituality. It is strange how similar the arguments used by him and by Colet seem, and how totally opposed their conclusions are. Colet believed that man was married to Christ and that a second earthly marriage would be an obscuring of this original spiritual union.⁴⁵ Erasmus believed that men are called to live their life in the world and that this was as worthy the name of vocation as any vow of chastity could be.⁴⁶ In the Colloquy called The Virgin Averse to Matrimony a young man tries to dissuade a young woman from entering a convent. Her parents disapprove of the idea. She asks her antagonist:

Do you think then, that I may not espouse my self to Christ without my Parents Consent?

to receive the answer:

I say, you have espoused him already, and so we have all. Where is the Woman that marries the same Man twice?⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Leland Miles, John Colet and the Platonic Tradition (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1961), p. 210.

⁴⁶ McConica, English Humanists and Reformation Politics, p. 19.

⁴⁷ All the Familiar Colloquies of Desiderius Erasmus, p. 154.

He uses virtually the same line of argument as Colet in order to deny the validity of a separate caste of people serving God in a state of superior spirituality.

Erasmus' belief that man's true calling is to encounter the world rather than fleeing from it lies at the heart of his ideas about marriage. In the same Colloquy the young girl complains: "Marry'd Folks are so given to talk smutty," but Eubulus replies:

He that would avoid every Thing that offends him must go out of the World; we must accustom our Ears to hear every Thing, but let nothing enter the Mind but what is good.

Marriage will offer her quite as many opportunities as single life:

"But considering your Genius as far as I can gather from your Complexion and Manners, I should rather advise you to an agreeable Husband, and set up a College in your own House, of which he should be the Abbot and you the Abbess." Erasmus thinks that the piety of monasticism is merely in externals. Eubulus says:

"They are not all Virgins that wear Vails; believe me," and adds:

And what is there more in a Convent than these? A Vail, a Linnen-Shift turned into a Stole, and certain Ceremonies, which of themselves signify nothing to the Advancement of Piety, and make no Body more acceptable in the Eyes of Christ, who only regards the Purity of the mind.⁴⁸

Chaste marriage is a reality by this myth of the holy life.

Let the swarmes of monkes, fryers, chanons, and nunnys avaunce theyr professyon as moch as them lust. Let them bost as moch as they wyll, theyr cerymonyes and dysguysed cotes (wherby they be chiefly knowen from the temporall) suerly the most holy kynd of lyfe is wedlocke puerly and chastly kept.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 150, 149, 151, 153-154.

⁴⁹ A Ryght Frutefull Epystle devysed by the Moste Excellent Clerke Erasmus in Laude and Prayse of Matrymony, trans. by Rychard Tavernour (London: Robert Redman, [1532]), sig. C1^v.

His Epistle In Laude and Prayse of Matrymony is written to his cousin in an attempt to dissuade him from going into a monastery after his mother's death.

One of Erasmus' main arguments against single life and in favour of chaste marriage, is that the latter is natural. It is foolish and wrong to cut oneself off from a state ordained by nature without whose operation one would never have come into existence:

What thyng is farder from all humanite than man to abhorre from the lawes of mannes estate? What is a more unkynde acte than to denye that to your yongers, which if ye toke nat of your elders, ye could nat be he that myght denye?

He calls "bachelershyp, a forme of lyvyng bothe barren and unnaturall," and adds that "neyther bachelars neyther virgyns shulde be if ye take away the use of wedlocke."⁵⁰ In a Colloquy called A Lover and Maiden Pamphilus urges his suit to Mary with the words: "A young Virgin is indeed a pretty Thing: But what's more monstrous, than an old Maid? If your Mother had not shed that Blossom, we should never have had this fine flower, your self."⁵¹ The law of man's nature dictates that marriage is his proper aim in life; this leads Erasmus to a liberal and honest discussion of man's sexual nature. He is very far from any medieval notions of the sinfulness of sex: "This is the lawe of nature nat graven in tables of bras, but inwardly fyred in our hartes, which who wyll nat obey, he is nat so much as to be esteemed a man much les a good cytizen."⁵² He has many impatient outbursts on the subject: "I here nat hym which wyll saye unto me that that foule ychyng and pryckes of carnall lust have come nat of nature, but of syn. What is more onlyke the trowth?

⁵⁰ Ibid, sigs. Av, Aiiii, Dvii.

⁵¹ All the Familiar Colloquies of Desiderius Erasmus, p. 143.

⁵² Erasmus, In Laude and Prayse of Matrymony, sig. Bii^v.

As though matrimony (whose offyce can nat be executed without these pryckes) was nat before syn," and argues that "surely we make that by our imaginacion to be fowle, which of the selfe nature is fayre and holy." For Erasmus what is natural is good, and what is unnatural is wrong:

As thoughe that is to be called vertue whyche repugneth with nature, from whens if vertue have nat his fyrste begynnyng, certes it can nat be it, whyche may with exercyse and lernynge be made perfecte.

God did not create the organs of generation in order that they might be redundant: "Why (I pray you) hath God geven us these membres? Why these pryckes and provocations? Why hath he added the power of begettyng, if bachelorshyp be taken for a prayse?" Of the man who cannot enjoy sex Erasmus says scornfully: "I wold cal hym no man but a playne stone."⁵³ It is rather amusing in this context to find a later Humanist virtually insisting on marriage and giving a list of those who may be exempted: "They that be colde of nature, bewiched and enchaunted, madde personnes, children, feble persons and suche as be gelded, and those whiche being moved with the spirit of God have chosen perpetuall chastitie."⁵⁴ The company that the chaste man is keeping in these lines is entirely congruous with Erasmus' spirit.

Both Erasmus and Vives are full of good advice for couples who are thinking of getting married, or who are married already. Of the two Erasmus is perhaps the more committed to the concept of equality between husband and wife, although Vives is certainly a liberal who believes that men and women are different and that this is as it should be, but not that women are

⁵³ Ibid, sigs. Bviii, Bviii^v, Bvii^v, Cviii^v.

⁵⁴ Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, The Commendation of Matrimony, trans. by David Clapham (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1545), sigs. Bvii-Bvii^v.

inferior and to be treated tyrannically. Both wax lyrical about the joys of a happy marriage, laying emphasis on the union of two minds as well as two bodies. Erasmus asks:

For what thyng is sweter, then with her to lyve, with whome ye may be most streyghtly copuled, nat onely in the benevolence of the mynd, but also in the coniunction of the body.⁵⁵

Vives states that "ther shalbe in wedlocke a certayne swete and pleasaunt conversation, withoute the whiche it is no maryage but a prysone." He believes that "thou shalte then leade a celestiall and a heavenly life, when there is such correspondente and mutuall love betwene you, as there is among the aungels and those blessed soules, whiche have left theyr bodies and are clothed with the divine and godly lyghte";⁵⁶ but perhaps Erasmus' picture of married bliss is the most vivid:

It is an especyall swetnes to have one with whom ye may communycate the secrete affectyons of your mynde, with whom ye may speake even as it were with your owne selfe, whom ye may savely truste, whyche supposethe your chaunces to be his, what felycyte (thynke ye) have the coniunction of man and wyfe, than whych no thyng in the unyversall worlde may be founde outhere greater or fermer.⁵⁷

Their belief in mental and spiritual compatibility as the root of conjugal happiness suggests to the Humanists various admonitions on the choice of a wife. Some of these anticipate the Puritans - disapproval of mercenary motives and disparity of age. Erasmus condemns the ambition of parents in arranging such marriages:

The unequal Marriage exposes to view the Folly of People in common, who in their Espousals chiefly regard the Greatness

⁵⁵ Erasmus, In Laude and Prayse of Matrymony, sig. Cvi.

⁵⁶ Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sigs. Nvii, Lv^v.

⁵⁷ Erasmus, In Laude and Prayse of Matrymony, sigs. Cvi-Cvi^v.

of Fortune, and disregard the Diseases of the Husband.
 . . . The Cruelty of Parents in matching their Daughters,
 is worse than that of Mezantius, of which Virgil writes in
 his Tenth Book of Aeneids. . . . The Commonwealth sustains
 a great Detriment by these foolish and unhappy Marriages.⁵⁸

But children should nevertheless have their parents' consent to
 their marriage. Pamphilus in A Lover and Maiden tells Mary
 that "The Match in my Opinion is like to be the more happy, if
 we have our Parents consent to it."⁵⁹

The Humanists tend to distrust romantic love as a guide
 to choosing a partner - a view springing from the same stem as
 their condemnation of romance literature. In his dedication to
 his translation of Vives' The Office and Duetie of an Husband,
 Thomas Paynell laments that "menne choose not their wives for
 their honestie and vertue, but for their intisinge beautie: . . .
 for carnall lust and pleasure."⁶⁰ Vives himself advises: "Geve
 not thy self to those unmete and voluptuous love and lustes, by
 the whiche men are compelled to sai and do many thinges which
 are filthy and childish. . . . The poet doth speake of this erthly
 and blind love." An elaborate and adulatory courtship is not a
 good preparation for marriage:

I wold not counsel ye to mary her, with whome thou hast
 bene in amors withal, whom thou flatterdest, whome thou
 didst serve, whom thou calledst thy hart, thy life, thy
 maistres, thy light, thy eyes, with other suche wordes as
 foolishe love doth perswade, usinge impietie agaynst God,
 which is the ende of al desire and goodnes. Thys submission
 is and shoulde be the cause, that she⁶⁷ doth not regard thee,
 but disdayneth to serve thee, whose ladye she was as she
 esteemed, and whom she found more obedient unto her, even

⁵⁸"The Unequal Marriage", All the Familiar Colloquies
of Desiderius Erasmus, p. 447.

⁵⁹All the Familiar Colloquies of Desiderius Erasmus, p. 146.

⁶⁰Thomas Paynell, Foreword to Vives, The Office and
Duetie of an Husband, sig. Aij^v.

with the peril and daunger of life, then any other slave that was bought for monie.

However Vives makes it clear that this is not merely a counsel of expediency, but one arising out of respect to the woman - another corollary to his hatred of romance: "Yf the woman were a certayn kynd of merchaundise, peradventure it shuld not seme so unsembly by all maner of meanes and subteltie to obtayne her: . . . but consideryng that nowe she shalbe his felow for ever. . . ."
Married love should be equal love, not the false subjection of either party. The process of choice should therefore be as rational as possible:

They shuld first by nature and with reason have iudged, and then embraced that thinge with love, or with hatred avoyded the same, the whiche yf man ought to do in choosynge of frendes, howe much more diligently ought it to be done in the choyce of a wife, the principal of al amitie and frendshippe.⁶¹

Vives has the comforting thought that: "Love doth pain sometimes, but it never slayeth."⁶² The same anti-romantic propensity lies behind the extraordinary arrangements adopted by the Utopians in choosing a partner. The word 'love' does not occur once in all the discussions of marriage; moreover it is recommended that the prospective lovers should be shown naked to each other before they are married to prevent the contracting of marriage between diseased people, and also because:

All men are not so wise as to regard only the character of the woman, and even in the marriages of wise men bodily attractions also are no small enhancement to the virtues of the mind. Certainly such foul deformity may be hidden beneath these coverings that it may quite alienate a man's mind from his wife when bodily separation is no longer lawful.⁶³

⁶¹ Vives, ibid, sigs. Nv^v-Nvi, Kv, Cxii^x, D^r.

⁶² Vives, The Instruction of a Christian Woman, p. 106.

⁶³ The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, IV, 189.

Although the ultra-rationality of such a method is consonant with the Humanist attitude to romantic passion, there is more than a touch of irony in it, as the issue on which they speak with one voice is that of the importance of mental compatibility. They all recommend that a man should choose a wife suited to him in intelligence and education: "A dull wyfe is nothyng meete nor convenient for a dull [sic] husband, . . . and yet ther shalbe a better agrement amonge these, then betwene a wyse man, and a dull or a foolyshe woman."⁶⁴ A man who chooses a woman simply for her beauty: "After that thou hast once satisfied thy filthye desyre, thou shalte finde thy selfe in miserye."⁶⁵ An educated wife is not only a delightful companion:

It will be your pleasure to spend days and nights in pleasant and intelligent conversation When she speaks, it will be difficult to judge between her extraordinary ability to say what she thinks and her thoughtful understanding of all kinds of affairs.⁶⁶

More adds: "I should think that the wife of the bard Orpheus long ago was such a woman; he would never have taken the trouble to recover from the dead, by impious effort, an uncultivated wife." She will also bring up her children judiciously and be equipped to teach them:

Happy is the woman whose education permits her to derive from the best of ancient works the principles which confer a blessing on life. Armed with this learning, she would not yield to pride in prosperity, nor to grief in distress - even though misfortune strike her down. . . . If she is well instructed herself, then some day she will teach your little grandsons, at an early age, to read.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sig. Gvii.

⁶⁵Ibid, sig. Gvii^v.

⁶⁶The Latin Epigrams of Thomas More, p. 182.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 182-183, 182.

Erasmus advises his prince that "your wife should be selected from all women for her integrity, modesty, and wisdom."⁶⁸

The final advantage of having an educated wife will be that she is easier to rule: "The foolisher, or the more withoute iudgement she be, the more insolente and the more intollerable she wyl be."⁶⁹

Erasmus believes that "there is nothing so hard to control as ignorance, in dealing with which reason and argument are of no avail."⁷⁰ To choose an educated wife is the first step in securing a fit conjunction of minds in marriage.

Both Erasmus and Vives are perceptive and analytical about the problems which face a couple when once they are married. Vives, writing primarily for the edification of the husband - in itself a radical innovation - urges him to try and understand a woman's nature and start with what he is given, without trying basically to change her:

As man can not be chaunged, nor utterly delivered of his affections, so let no man hope to chaunge a woman from her proper and native nature: make her better he may, but he shal never wholly adnichilate her affections, for as it is not in him to make of a woman no woman, so it is not in him to make of a man no man.⁷¹

His attitude to women's faults - their loquacity, enviousness, tendency to be overbearing about their social status, competitiveness and inclination to superstition - is that they are all bearable and even have their positive advantages. He adopts the extra-

⁶⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, The Education of a Christian Prince, trans. by Lester K. Born (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965), p. 241.

⁶⁹ Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sig. Gviii^v.

⁷⁰ Woodward, Desiderius Erasmus: concerning the Aim and Method of Education, pp. 150-151.

⁷¹ Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sig. Eiiij^v.

ordinarily advanced view that women's caprices often arise from their lack of self-confidence: "For lacke of experience of thinges, of wisdom, and of knowinge her owne debilitie, she thinketh continuallye that she shall be despised." But she should not be blamed for qualities which are hers by nature rather than the idiosyncracies of one individual. "All these foresayde thinges are of nature, and not of women them selves, and therefore they are not onelye found in women, but also in such men, as . . . are woman like."

On the question of obedience, Vives is more conservative than Erasmus. He believes that the woman should obey, but that there is no excuse for tyranny in the husband's treatment of her:

Some there be, that through evyll and roughe handelynge and in threatenynge of their wives, have them not as wives but as servauntes. . . . [They] complayne that they find no love in them, whose love and amite through their own importunitie thei turned into hatred.

It is the husband's task to win his wife to obey him through loving kindness:

Yf so be that the husbände have obtayned that his wyfe doth truly and heartely love hym, there shal nede nother preceptes nor lawes, for love shall teache her more thinges and more effectuously, then the preceptes of al the Philosophers.⁷²

Erasmus, however, not only recognises a reciprocal obligation, but believes that the clever wife will be able to manage her husband for the greater happiness of them both. Cornelia in The Assembly or Parliament of Women asserts that "for the most part it is in our Power to make our Husbands such as we would have them,"⁷³ and Eulalia, in a dialogue with Xantippa, expands the point; the

⁷² Ibid, sigs. Ei^v, Eij^v-Eij, Kviii^v-Li, Nviii^v.

⁷³ All the Familiar Colloquies of Desiderius Erasmus, p. 483.

wife should fit herself to her husband's humour, "that she be not mery when he murneth nor dysposed to play when he is sad,"⁷⁴ but if he is in the wrong she has a right to tell him of it as long as she does not reprove him in public:

It is lafull that the wyfe tell the good man his faute, if that it be matter of substaunce . . . betwixt you two secretly he must be told his faute gently, or rather intreated, that in this thyng or that he play the better husbände, to loke better to his good name and fame and to his helth and this tellyng must be myxt with mery conceites and pleasaunt wordes many times.⁷⁵

But if a good woman can make her husband good, Erasmus believes that it also works the other way round. He is impatient of men who cavill about their wives' evil qualities:

Beleve me, an evyll wyfe is nat wont to chaunce, but to evyll husbondes. . . . Of an evyll husbände (I wyll well) a good wyfe may be mard, but of a good the evyll is wont to be reformed and mended. We blame wyves falsly. No man (if ye gyve any credence to me) had ever a shrewe to his wyfe but thughe hys owne defaute.⁷⁶

Agrippa echoes him later in The Glory of Women, and complains of men's justifying their tyranny over their wives out of the Bible: "There are moreover which assume Authority to themselves over Women by vertue of Religion, and doe prove their Tyranny out of holy Writ."⁷⁷ But Erasmus must have the final tart statement of equality: "A rare byrd in erthe (ye say) is an honest woman. And

⁷⁴ D. Erasmus Roterodamus, A Mery Dialogue, declaringe the Propertyes of Shrowde Shrewes, and Honest Wyves, trans. by [Antony Kytson] (London: Antony Kytson, 1557), sig. Avli.

⁷⁵ Ibid, sig. Avii^v.

⁷⁶ Erasmus, In Laude and Prayse of Matrymony, sig. Dii^v.

⁷⁷ Agrippa, The Glory of Women, pp. 30-31.

ymagine ye agayne youre selfe worthy to have a rare wyfe."⁷⁸

It is interesting to notice in passing the attitudes to sex of Vives and Erasmus in these treatises. Again Vives is cautious and conservative, preaching moderation and modesty: "Let everyman use his owne vessell in sanctification and holynes."⁷⁹ He wants to keep some of the ascetic ideal even in marriage, and not to permit "luxuriousnesse". For Erasmus, on the other hand, the sexual relationship of man and wife is the symbol of their joyful agreement, and the balm of their troubles. Eulalia advises Xantippa not to quarrel with her husband in bed:

Be wyse of this especyall that thou never gyve hym foule wordes in the chambre, or in bed, but be sure that all thynges there bee full of pastyme and pleasure. For yf that place which is ordeined to make amendes for all fautes and so to renew love, be polluted, eyther with strife or grugynges, then fayre wel al hope of love daies, or atonementes, yet there be some beastes so wayward and mischevous, that when theyr husbandes hath them in their armes a bed, they scholde and chyde.⁸⁰

And she expresses the emancipated view that the woman should not hesitate to show her delight to her husband - a refreshing respite from the strictures of medieval sinfulness or over-emphasised modesty.

The wyfe ought to dyspose her selfe all that she maye that lieing by her husband she shew him al the plesure that she can. Wherby the honest love of matrimony may revive and be renewed.⁸¹

Erasmus emerges as the most advanced thinker among

⁷⁸ Erasmus, In Laude and Prayse of Matrymony, sig. Diii^v.

⁷⁹ Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sig. Rv.

⁸⁰ Erasmus, A Mery Dialogue, declaringe the Propertyes of Shrowde Shrewes, and Honest Wyves, sig. Bvi.

⁸¹ Ibid, sig. Bvi^v.

the Humanists with astonishingly liberal attitudes to marriage, and to women in particular. Vives runs him a close second in his concern for the husband's understanding of his wife's nature, and his psychological approach to the problems of marriage, and especially of the woman's role in it, but Erasmus' attitudes are often more truly egalitarian and even feminist in implication than the most forward-looking of the Puritan preachers.

Humanist ideals for women's education and for their part in married life help to shape the attitudes to women which inform Puritan teaching, and which are reflected in the drama at a time when it is in contact with a varied social group. The contribution of the Humanists towards that "enlarged view" of women's place in society from which all practical advances in women's education must spring,⁸² cannot be exaggerated; the literature of the time provides evidence of the extent to which their ideas were disseminated among the middle and upper-class public. What is difficult to establish is whether their excellent theory influenced the actual education of any more than a handful of exceptional women.

Although the articulate women who have left records of their lives in one form or another during this period must be regarded as exceptions, it is interesting to compare their degree of education with the standard of achievement exemplified in More's daughters, Sir Anthony Cooke's daughters, Lady Jane Grey (who found games in the Park "but a shadoo to that pleasure, that I find

⁸² William Harrison Woodward, Studies in Education during the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), p. 267.

in Plato"⁸³), or the Queen herself, of whom Ascham claimed that "beside her perfit readines, in Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish, she readeth here now at Windsore more Greeke every day, than some Prebendarie of this Chirch doth read Latin in a whole weeke."⁸⁴ Elizabeth continued to be surrounded by noble women in whom knowledge of Latin and the modern languages was a commonplace.⁸⁵ Nobly born girls received their education by living in the household of some great lady, and being taught by a Tutor from Oxford or Cambridge. Among the lesser aristocracy and the gentry the same system held but often without the tutor. Women received girls into their house and educated them in household management and whatever accomplishments they themselves were proficient in.⁸⁶ Lady Anne Clifford records her impatience with one of her charges:

August 1619 I fell out with Kate Burton and swore I would not keep her and caused her to send to her Father.

The 18th Sir Edward Burton came hither and I told him I would not keep his daughter.⁸⁷

Lady Brilliana Harley sends her daughter to Lady Vere's household, and anxiously requests her son: "Deare Ned, send me word how my ladey Veere usess her, and how shee carriers herself."⁸⁸

⁸³Ascham, The Scholemaster, p. 47. ⁸⁴Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁵Violet A. Wilson, Society Women of Shakespeare's Time (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Limited, 1924).

⁸⁶Kenneth Charlton, Education in Renaissance England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 209, 210.

⁸⁷The Diary of the Lady Anne Clifford, with an introductory note by V. Sackville-West (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1923), p. 106.

⁸⁸Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, with an introduction and notes by Thomas Taylor Lewis (London: printed for the Camden Society, 1854), p. 158.

Lady Margaret Hoby, herself brought up in the Countess of Huntingdon's house,⁸⁹ has a succession of girls to train in domestic affairs. The quality and breadth of education offered obviously depended wholly on the individual woman, and it is interesting to compare, as a guide, the intellectual activities of these three.

Lady Hoby is the most limited of the three. Her Diary evinces a rigorous religious life reading sermons (Babington, Gifforde, Greenham), praying, self-examination; a Puritanical attitude to relaxation: "[I] . . . exercised my body at bowles a whill, of which I found good," and a strong social conscience reminiscent of Dorothea Brooke: "[I] . . . walked with Mr. Hoby about the toun to spye out the best places where Cotiges might be builded." She is an amateur physician, like most women in her position: "I went to awiffe in travill of child, about whom I was busey (torn) tell: 1 a Cloke, about which time, She bing deliuered and I hauinge praised god, returned home and betook my selfe to priuat praier."⁹⁰ But the education which equipped her for this way of life - the business of the estate, providing for the household - must have been predominantly practical, without the liberal scope advocated by the Humanists.

Lady Brilliana Harley is as efficient domestically as Lady Hoby, running her husband's estates during his absence at Parliament, and defending their Castle against Royalist siege. Her reading, however, is much wider. She requests her son to bring 'Eusebius' back from Oxford with him, whom possibly she read in Greek. Her letters mention great writers unself-consciously: "I am glad that justice is excicuted on my lord

⁸⁹Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605, ed. by Dorothy M. Meads (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1930), p. 5.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 77, 68, 69; 70, 65, 63.

Straford, whoo I thinke dyed like a Seneca, but not like one that had tasted the mistery of godlyness."⁹¹ Her familiarity with Latin is evident:

Hauing bine offtin not well, and confined to so sollatary a place as my beed, I made choys of an entertainment for meself, which might be eassy and of some benifit to meself; in which I made choys to reade the life of Luther, rwite by Mr. Callven. I did the more willingly reade it, becaus he is generally branded with ambistion, which caused him to doo what he did, and that the papis doo so generally obrade us that we cannot tell wheare our religion was before Luther Theas resons made me desire to reade his life, to see vpon what grownd theas opinions weare biult; and finding such satisfaction to meself, how fallsly theas weare raised, I put it into Inglisch, and heare in closed haue sent it you; it is not all his life, for I put no more into Inglisch then was not in the booke of Marters.

She frequently either sends Ned books or recommends them to him: "Theare is a very fine discours rwiten in Italien, but translated in to Latine; it is dedicated to Oxsensterne, he that was tresure to the king of Sweden; if the book desarfe the commendation I could wisch you did reade it, but I can not send you the titell of the booke." She had more luck with another about which she had been arguing with Ned's tutor:

In the basket with the appells is 'the Returne of Prayer.' I could not find the place I spake of to your tutor when he was with me; but since, I found it, and haue sent the booke to you, that he may see it, and judg a littell of it."⁹²

Her education stretched beyond the rigid limits of piety apparent in Lady Hoby's; her letters bespeak intellectual curiosity.

Lady Anne Clifford is the most adventurous mentally. Donne, whom she entertained at Knole, is quoted saying that "she knew well how to discourse of all things, from Predestination to

⁹¹ Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, p. 131.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 78, 52, 109, 65-66.

Slea-silk."⁹³ In her Diary she reports what she reads almost as faithfully as what she wears, and the sums she loses at Glecko.

April 1617 The 26th I spent the evening in working and going down to my Lord's Closet where I sat and read much in the Turkish History and Chaucer.

.....
June 1619 My Coz Maria read Ovid's Metamorphoses to me.

.....
January 1617 Rivers used to read to me in Montaigne's Plays and Moll Neville in the Fairy Queen.

Arcadia, Montaigne's Essays, a History of the Netherlands and Josephus are mentioned, together with the Chronicles which she read to induce stoicism:

February 1617 My soul was much troubled and afflicted to see how things go, but my trust is still in God, and compare things past with things present and read over the Chronicles.⁹⁴

There is no suggestion of the earnest and systematic study that Vives laid down for the Princess Mary. But the ease and avidity with which she absorbs the works of great writers implies a quality of mind comparable to the Queen's or Lady Jane Grey's, or that of Lady Russell herself, and certainly does nothing to belie Donne's claim for her.

All these women have the education of noblewomen, and while this does not seem to have declined since the middle of the century - even the story of female patronage goes on, with Dorothy Wadham's founding of Wadham College - it says nothing about the effect of Humanist teaching on middle-class women. Here again only exceptional women have left records. Grace

⁹³The Sermons of John Donne, ed. by George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), I. 130, n. 36.

⁹⁴The Diary of the Lady Anne Clifford, pp. 66, 104, 52, 76, 41, 111, 56.

Sherrington in her Journal lists her activities - arithmetic, letter writing, Dr. Turner's Herball and Bartholomew Vigoe, psalm-singing, lute-playing, physic, the Bible, needlework;⁹⁵ neither a frivolous way of life, nor an arduous intellectual discipline.

One middle-class woman, however, deserves to be ranked with the learned women of the Humanist circle. Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson describes the care taken with her education:

When I was about seven years of age, I remember I had at one time eight tutors in several qualities, languages, music, dancing, writing, and needlework; but my genius was quite averse from all but my book, and that I was so eager of, that my mother thinking it prejudiced my health, would moderate me in it; yet this rather animated me than kept me back, and every moment I could steal from my play I would employ in any book I could find.✓

This little Maggie Tulliver describes how:

My father would have me learn Latin, and I was so apt that I outstripped my brothers who were at school My mother would have been contented I had not so wholly addicted myself to that as to neglect my other qualities. As for music and dancing I profited very little in them, and would never practise my lute or harpsichord but when my masters were with me; and for my needle I absolutely hated it.⁹⁶✓

This suggests that Humanist ideals for women's education had some influence on the lives of the middle-class gentry - Lucy Hutchinson is nearer Erasmus's model than any of the three noblewomen - even though she is exceptional.

It seems likely that, as in sixteenth century Italy, despite Humanist propaganda the percentage of girls actually educated

⁹⁵Charlton, Education in Renaissance England, p. 210.

⁹⁶The Life of Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson, written by herself, in Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, by his widow Lucy, ed. by the Rev. Julius Hutchinson, revised by C. H. Firth (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd.; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906), p. 14.

in anything beyond domesticity remained minimal.⁹⁷ The infiltration of Humanist ideals into society helped to change the climate of opinion with regard to women, rather than bringing about a practical revolution.

Their ideas on marriage, however, did not have to face the entrenched conservatism which operates against education for women. Protestant, Humanist and Puritan re-assessment of the nature of marriage and the position of the wife leaves a permanent imprint on the cultural life of the first half of the seventeenth century. Its assimilation into real life may be gauged from the way in which Dorothy Osborne writes about marriage in her letters to William Temple:

Let them truste to it that think good, for my Parte I am cleerly of opinion . . . that as the more one sees and know's, a person that one likes, one has still the more kindenesse for them, soe on the other side one is but the more weary of and the more averse to an unpleasant humor for haveing it perpetually by one, and though I easily beleeeve that to marry one for whome wee have already some affection, will infinitely Encrease that kindenesse, yet I shall never bee perswaded that Marriage has a Charme to raise love out of nothing, much lesse out of dislike.

Her analysis of what she looks for in a husband would have delighted Vives and Erasmus: "There are a great many ingredients must goe to the makeing mee happy in a husband, first, . . . our humors must agree."⁹⁸ Her confidence in married love, rational assessment of its elements, and cordial, self-respecting assumption of equality between the sexes, are the fruits of Humanist repudiation of the corrupting and spurious ideals of romantic love outside marriage as set forth in medieval romance.

⁹⁷Woodward, Studies in Education during the Age of the Renaissance 1400-1600, pp. 266-267.

⁹⁸The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to William Temple, ed. by G. C. Moore Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), pp. 9-10, 105.

This new apprehension of romantic love and of the naturalness and goodness of sexual passion within marriage liberates the creative energy of the early seventeenth century into exploring the assumptions surrounding marriage and the position of women. Analyses of romantic passion, of domestic relations, and of female character in the drama are stimulated by a consciousness of Humanist and Puritan ideals. The heroine who is both feminine and self-sufficient in a man's world is as much the legacy of the Humanists as the anti-romantic treatment of love, and especially adulterous love, which is a distinctive element in some of the most remarkable plays of the time.

CHAPTER III

MARRIAGE

The secular drama, ready to cope with domestic relations, emerges at the time when the Puritans were popularising Protestant and Humanist attitudes to women and marriage, and adapting them to a middle-class context. The same attitudes are evident in the drama, aimed at the same audience. The result is an enlarging of the dramatists' terms of reference: they can evoke the atmosphere of elevation surrounding Puritan precepts on married love; sensitivity to theological controversy offers them a new dimension for their observation of human passion and caprice. They accept their audience's familiarity with the concept of married chastity, and use it as the starting-point for analysing the moral issues involved in celibacy, second marriage, the spiritual and physical aspects of the marriage relationship, and (the balance of power between man and wife.

The plays mirror Protestant and Humanist opposition to the choice of celibacy in preference to marriage. Angelo in Measure for Measure is the foul celibate reviled by the Protestant reformers, whose restraint aggravates his lust. Jokes are made about nuns, and their vocation is regarded as an aberration. Frances in The Puritaine appreciates that her precipitate renunciation was misguided:

Well, seeing I am enioynd to loue and marry,
My foolish vow thus I casheere to Ayre
Which first begot it.¹

¹ The Puritaine or The Widdow of Watling-Streete, in The Shakespeare Apocrypha, ed. by C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford:

The arguments of Thomas Becon, and of Erasmus, reappear. If a thirst for spiritual trial is the motive for entering the convent, marriage makes more complex demands on the human spirit.

Although Julia in Patient Grissill eulogizes virginity, and scorns marriage:

Your wife is your ape, and that heauie burthen wedlocke,
your lacke an Apes clog, therefore ile not bee tyed too't:
. . . sweet virginitie is that inuisible God-head that turns vs
into Angells, that makes vs saints on earth and starres in
heauen: heere Virgins seeme goodly, but there glorious:
In heauen is no wooing yet all there are lovely: in heauen
are no weddings yet al there are louers,²

the action of the play illustrates the greater endurance necessary in a wife, and the corollary of greater joy in reconciliation.

Isabella in Measure for Measure, after pleading for stricter restraint in the convent, finds that the nobler calling is to face the evils and sorrows of the world instead of turning her back on them - Erasmus' doctrine of lay spirituality. Her sudden apprehension of the suffering of Mariana, and characteristic judgment that to leave the world would be her only consolation: "What a merit were it in death to take this poor maid from the world,"³ leads her to embrace deceit partly to secure justice for

Clarendon Press, 1918), IV.iii.93. Characteristically Ben Jonson jibes at Puritan contempt of the convent in the divorce scene in Epicoene. Cutbeard lists the pretexts for divorce: "The third is votum. If either party have made a vow of chastity. But that practice . . . is taken away among us, thanks be to discipline." Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, ed. by I. A. Beaurline (London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1966), V.iii.109.

² Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill, in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. by Fredson Bowers, I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), II.i.261.

³ Shakespeare, Measure for Measure, ed. by J. W. Lever, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965), III.i.231.

her. Her own spiritual development is apparent in her active acquiescence in Mariana's plea for Angelo:

They say best men are moulded out of faults,
And, for the most, become much more the better
For being a little bad.⁴

A new sympathy replaces her inexperienced asceticism. The Duke's warning to Angelo is relevant to her case:

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd
But to fine issues.⁵

She discovers in herself the Grace which she sought in the convent, but divorced from doctrinal properties: "Grace is grace, despite of all controversy."⁶ It is appropriate to her new-found understanding of the world that (the vocation she finally embraces is not the nunnery, but married life) *the self is made the D.*

The most recurrent argument against single life, however, is its unfruitfulness and unnaturalness. The waiting-woman in Bussy D'Ambois observes: "Ye must gather us with the ladder of matrimony, or we'll hang till we be rotten."⁷ Parolles warns Helena; "'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth."⁸ The Fool in Twelfth Night taunts Olivia with the short-sightedness of her seclusion: "As there is no true cuckold but calamity, so beauty's a flower: the lady bade

⁴ Ibid., V.i.437.

⁵ Ibid., I.i.32.

⁶ Ibid., I.ii.24.

⁷ George Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, in The Works of George Chapman: Plays, ed. by Richard Herne Shepherd (London: Chatto & Windus, 1889), p. 158.

⁸ Shakespeare, All's Well That Ends Well, ed. by G. K. Hunter, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1959), I.i.149.

take away the fool, therefore I say again, take her away."⁹

Viola urges fruitfulness, like Agrippa, almost as a social duty:

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy.¹⁰

Theseus reminds Hermia of the sterility of "single blessedness":

Question your desires,
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.¹¹

The fullest statement of the Humanist attitude to virginity is Parolles' in All's Well That Ends Well; it is interesting not only for its kinship with Erasmus, but for its almost verbatim echoing of Donne's Paradox "That Virginity is a Virtue." A Renaissance audience would have recognised in both cases the nature of the paradox. Parolles' attack on virginity is a paradox because it contradicts "received opinion."¹² Donne's is a different type; it claims to defend virginity while in fact attacking it.¹³ It has been

⁹Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, ed. by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), I.v.49.

¹⁰Ibid., I.v.245.

¹¹Shakespeare, A Midsummer-Night's Dream, ed. by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), I.i.67.

¹²Rosalie L. Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 9-12.

¹³Colie's comments on this paradox are confusing. She asserts in her Introduction (Ibid., p. 14) that it "restates a truism, in order to point to current libertine practice and to reconsider the precise virtue in being a virgin," but this implies that Donne

said that "paradoxes flourish in a period with many competitive truths", that they exploit "relative, or competing, value systems. . . . Challenging some orthodoxy, the paradox is an oblique criticism of absolute judgment or absolute convention."¹⁴ This challenge is clear in both Parolles' and Donne's arguments.

Shakespeare develops the paradox dramatically. Parolles' unorthodox statement of (the non-virtue of virginity) becomes Helena's accepted orthodoxy: (as a married woman she is possessed of a "peevish" virginity). She resolves that "the name of Virgin shall be exchanged for a farre more honorable name, A Wife."¹⁵ But in the course of the play her new-found orthodoxy encounters its own relativity by facing the justice of the old belief: for Diana virginity is a virtue which must be kept till marriage: "Virginity is a vertue, and hath her Throne in the middle: The extreame are, in Excesse, to violate it before marriage; in Defect, not to marry. . . . The excesse proceeds from Lust, the defect from Peevishnesse, Pride and Stupidity."¹⁶ Finally, out of the paradox, with its denial of the conventional absolute that virginity is a virtue, arises a new absolute, that virginity is not a virtue because, as Erasmus asserted, the human race depends for survival on its loss:

was engaging in a social debate instead of a theological one. In her discussion of Donne himself, however, she agrees that the paradox "argues against its initial premise," (pp. 104-105), but still insists on a libertine audience, which seems to me an unnecessary complication. Her category for Montaigne's "Apologie for Raymond Sebond" (p. 4) fits Donne's paradox perfectly.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 37, 10.

¹⁵ John Donne, "That Virginity Is a Vertue," in John Donne: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. by John Hayward (London: The Nonesuch Library, 1955), p. 349.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 347. Cf. Shakespeare, All's Well That Ends Well, I.i. 141.

It is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to preserve virginity. Loss of virginity is rational increase, and there was never virgin got till virginity was first lost.¹⁷

For surely nothing is more unprofitable in the Commonwealth of Nature, than they that dy old maids, because they refuse to be used, to that end for which they were only made.¹⁸

Parolles continues: "To speak on the part of virginity is to accuse your mothers, which is most infallible disobedience"¹⁹; Donne asserts that "foolish maids . . . accuse their parents in condemning marriage."²⁰

Although Shakespeare and Donne draw on the common source of Erasmus, All's Well That Ends Well contains such close parallels to Donne's Paradox that it is tempting to think that Shakespeare had seen it. The idea of married chastity is central to Donne's views on marriage. In his Sermon for Sir Francis Nethersole's marriage he states that the Roman Church "injure the whole state of Christianity, when they oppose mariage and chastity, as though they were incompatible, and might not consist together."²¹ In another he dismisses celibacy with an image:

When God had made Adam and Eve in Paradise, though there were foure rivers in Paradise, God did not place Adam in a Monastery on one side, and Eve in a Nunnery on the other, and so a River between them. They that build wals and cloysters to frustrate Gods institution of mariage, advance the Doctrine of Devils in forbidding mariage."²²

¹⁷ Shakespeare, ibid., I.i.123.

¹⁸ Donne, "That Virginitie Is a Vertue," p. 347.

¹⁹ Shakespeare, All's Well That Ends Well, I.i.134.

²⁰ Donne, "That Virginitie Is a Vertue," p. 348.

²¹ The Sermons of John Donne, II, 340.

²² Ibid., III, 242.

That he and Shakespeare should unite over a passage which forms an important part of his belief, and is a keystone in a complex philosophical play about marriage and the nature of chastity, indicates the way in which the drama draws life from issues canvassed outside the theatre.

The dramatists show a Puritan sympathy for second marriage, the corollary of their conviction that living alone is unnatural. The Catholic view that second marriage is a lapse²³ is discounted by making its advocates absurd, misguided or unprincipled. In The Puritaine a character satirically named Simon Saint Mary-Overies asserts that "widdowes ought not to wallow in the puddle of iniquity," and that "their filthy flesh desires a Coniunction Copulative."²⁴ The Duchess's hyperbolic vow of perpetual widowhood in More Dissemblers Besides Women dissolves

I confess I'm mortal;

.

Is not this flesh? can you drive heat from fire?²⁵

into a new compassion for human weakness comparable to Isabella's:

We all have faults; look not so much on his;
Who lives i' th' world that never did amiss?²⁶

The Widow in The Puritaine realises the folly of her first vow of asceticism, and of her second precipitate marriage with a rogue, from which she is rescued in time to make a sensible match. She is

²³ M. C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p.

²⁴ The Puritaine or The Widdow of Watling-Streete, III.i.5.

²⁵ Thomas Middleton, More Dissemblers Besides Women, in The Works of Thomas Middleton, ed. by A. H. Bullen, VI (London: John C. Nimmo, 1885), I.iii.107.

²⁶ Ibid., V.ii.259.

saved from "the blind besotting in the state of an unheaded woman thats a widdow."²⁷ In The Duchess of Malfi Webster contrasts the lasciviousness and corruption of Ferdinand and the Cardinal who counsel restraint: "They are most luxurious / Will wed twice," with the virtuousness of the Duchess's relation to Antonio.²⁸ Opposing theological standpoints form a backcloth for the depiction of individual character.

The dramatists stress the spiritual equality of man and wife in marriage. Characters exalt passion to a paradisiac vision. Antonio urges the Duchess of Malfi:

Begin with that first good deed began i' th' world
After man's creation, the sacrament of marriage.²⁹

Albano in Marston's What You Will meditates:

If love be holy; if that mystery
Of co-united hearts be sacrament,
If the unbounded goodness have infused
A sacred ardour, if a mutual love,
Into our species, . . .
.
If that clear flame deduce his heat from heaven; -
'Tis like his cause, eternal, always One,
As is th'instiller of divinest love,
Unchanged by time, immortal maugre death!³⁰

More subtle is Middleton's ironic portrayal of Alsemero's adoration of Beatrice:

²⁷The Puritaine or The Widdow of Watling-Streete, V.iv.8.

²⁸John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, ed. by John Russell Brown, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen & Co.Ltd., 1964), I.i.297. In Painter, The Palace of Pleasure, Webster's principal source, the Duchess's second marriage is considered lustful, and her ruin a retribution. It is significant that Webster rejected this interpretation of her actions.

²⁹Webster, ibid., I.i.385.

³⁰John Marston, What You Will, in The Works of John Marston, ed. by A. H. Bullen, II (London: John C. Nimmo, 1887), III.ii.41.

I love her beauties to the holy purpose;
 And that, methinks, admits comparison
 With man's first creation, the place blessed,
 And is his right home back, if he achieve it.³¹

- about to be shattered by a second Eve. Lovers accept the Puritan (view that the love of a good woman approximates to the love of God,) although the dramatist may show that the caprices of passion can bring disillusion.

This hallowed love brings (equality between man and wife,) both share the responsibility for mutual joyfulness:

Mutual love may be compar'd to heaven,
 For then their souls and spirits are at peace.³²

Freevill in The Dutch Courtesan calls marriage "the holy union of two equal hearts,"³³ and Clara in The Spanish Gipsy echoes him:

Heaven's great hand, that on record
 Fore-points the equal union of all hearts
 Long since decreed what this day hath been perfected.³⁴

In The Family of Love Gerardine speaks of the "precious thoughts of two consenting hearts"; his love, Maria considers "society in nuptials"³⁵ the highest vocation for women.

³¹ Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, The Changeling, in VI, The Works of Thomas Middleton, I.i.6.

³² How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt, IX (London: Reeves and Turner, 1874), p. 10.

³³ John Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, in II, The Works of John Marston, V.i.72.

³⁴ Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, The Spanish Gipsy, in VI, The Works of Thomas Middleton, V.i.60.

³⁵ Thomas Middleton, The Family of Love, in III, The Works of Thomas Middleton, I.ii.17., II.iv.33.

Like the Humanists, the dramatists emphasise the union of like minds: "Not always like in complexion, nor like in years, nor like in fortune, nor like in birth, but like in minde, like in disposition, like in the love of God, and of one another."³⁶ Pisanio rates Posthumus as Imogen's inferior only when his nobility of mind falls below hers:

O my master,
Thy mind to her is now as low as were
Thy fortunes.³⁷

Dowsecer in Chapman's An Humorous Day's Mirth dismisses (admiration of physical beauty alone as degrading to women)

But to admire them as our gallants do
'Oh, what an eye she hath! Oh! dainty hand,
'Rare foot and leg! ' and leave the mind respectless;
This is a plague that in both men and women
Makes such pollution of our earthly being.³⁸

His passion for Martia is a spiritual revelation: "The excellent disposer of the mind shines in thy beauty."³⁹ (Man and wife are one body and one mind). Cleanthes and Hippolita confide in each other confidently in The Old Law:

Why, there is but one body in all this counsel,
Which cannot betray itself: we two are one,
One soul, one body, one heart, think all one thought.⁴⁰

³⁶The Sermons of John Donne, III, 247.

³⁷Shakespeare, Cymbeline, ed. by J. M. Nosworthy, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1955), III.ii.9.

³⁸George Chapman, An Humorous Day's Mirth, in The Works of George Chapman, p. 33.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Thomas Middleton, Philip Massinger and William Rowley The Old Law, in II, The Works of Thomas Middleton, I.i.455.

Mrs. Arthur in How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad identifies herself with the husband that Anselm accuses:

If he be call'd a villain, what is she,
Whose heart and love, and soul, is one with him?⁴¹

Portia's description of the friendship of Bassanio and Antonio applies equally well to man and wife:

In companions
That do converse and waste the time together,
Whose souls do bear an egall yoke of love,
There must be needs a like proportion
Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit.⁴²

Cynicism about women accompanies the belief that procreation is the chief end of marriage, rather than mutual comfort. Lemot in An Humorous Day's Mirth punningly explains: "I told her Dowsecer, and this his friend, threatened to take away, and if they could, the instrument of procreation; and what was that now but Martia? being a fair woman, is not she the instrument of procreation, as all women are?"⁴³ The importance of reproduction is so exaggerated in the case of Lady Kix in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside that her marriage is considered perfect only when she is pregnant, although it is by a man other than her husband.

The most telling dissection of the controversy about the nature of marriage comes from the Clown in All's Well That Ends Well. He claims to embrace Catholic theology (it is better to marry than to burn); marriage is a choice of the world, the flesh and the devil: "If I may have your ladyship's good will to go to the

⁴¹ How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, p. 25.

⁴² Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, ed. by John Russell Brown, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1955), III.iv. 11.

⁴³ Chapman, An Humorous Day's Mirth, p. 42.

world, Isbel the woman and I will do as we may." "I am driven on by the flesh, and he must needs go that the devil drives." He mocks Puritan sanctifying of marriage by hinting "I have other holy reasons," but concludes with a sting of disbelief in its joys: "I have been, madam, a wicked creature, as you and all flesh and blood are, and indeed I do marry that I may repent." The crucial point in his argument is his plea for tailoring theological abstraction to fit men and women as they are - the same whatever their doctrine

If men could be contented to be what they are, there were no fear in marriage; for young Charbon the puritan and old Poysam the papist, howsome'er their hearts are sever'd in religion, their heads are both one; they may jowl horns together like any deer i' th' herd.⁴⁴

In these plays sexual passion within marriage is considered natural and good. Bodily union symbolises the spiritual conjunction of man and wife. Phoenix's eulogy on married love reads like Milton's "Hail, wedded love" in Paradise Lost:

Reverend and honourable Matrimony,
Mother of lawful sweets, unshamed mornings,
Dangerless pleasures! thou that mak'st the bed
Both pleasant and legitimately fruitful!
.....
Thou art the only and the greatest form
That put'st a difference between our desires
And the disorder'd appetites of beasts.⁴⁵

Hercules in The Fawn speaks an epithalamium for Tiberio and and Dulcimet, while they consummate their marriage off-stage:

⁴⁴ All's Well That Ends Well, I.iii.15, I.iii.26, I.iii.30, I.iii.48.

⁴⁵ Thomas Middleton, The Phoenix, in I, The Works of Thomas Middleton, II.ii.164. See R. B. Parker, "Middleton's Experiments with Comedy and Judgement," Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies, Vol. I: Jacobean Theatre (London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1960), 181.

Thou mother of chaste dew, night's modest lamp,
 Thou by whose faint shine the blushing lovers
 Join glowing cheeks, and mix their trembling lips
 In vows well kiss'd, rise all as full of splendour
 As my breast is of joy.⁴⁶

Freevill in The Dutch Courtezan sees Beatrice as rescuing him
 from lawless lust:

My betrothed dearest, whose chaste eyes,
 Full of loved sweetness and clear cheerfulness,
 Have gaged my soul to her enjoyings;
 Shedding away all those weak under-branches
 Of base affections and unfruitful heats.⁴⁷

Sexual desire, as long as it is channelled into marriage,
 is not incompatible with chastity. Men and women can dismiss
 false modesty and unwilling asceticism, and express delight in
 each other freely, as Eulalia recommended in Erasmus's Mery
Dialogue. (For women, traditionally the modest sex, the
 emancipation is considerable: wives can be frank about passion
 without forfeiting men's respect). The Duchess of Malfi is light-
 heartedly sensuous: "Alas, what pleasure can two lovers find in
 sleep?"⁴⁸ Desdemona sues for her wedding-night not to be post-
 poned:

If I be left behind,
 A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
 The rites for which I love him are bereft me,
 And I a heavy interim shall support
 By his dear absence; let me go with him.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ John Marston, The Fawn, in II, The Works of John Marston, V.i.1.

⁴⁷ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, II.i.3. Marston's view of sex in marriage derives directly from Montaigne, but is basically the same as the Puritans'. Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 39.

⁴⁸ Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, III.ii.10.

⁴⁹ Shakespeare, Othello, ed. by M. R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1958), I.iii.255.

No self-conscious bashfulness marrs Juliet's enthusiasm for hers:

Come, civil Night
Thou sober-suited matron all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Played for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
Hood my unmanned blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle till strange love, grown bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.⁵⁰

The only condition of married chastity is constancy, and
in the drama these two words are often used interchangeably.⁵¹

The marriage union of John and Constanza in The Spanish Gipsy is described in terms of nature:

You the Sun with her must play,
She to you the marigold,
To none but you her leaves unfold.⁵²

Penitent Brothel in A Mad World, my Masters, admonishes his former mistress:

Live honest, and live happy, keep thy vows;
(She's part a virgin whom but one man knows)⁵³

Scapha, a bawd, scoffs at Puritan idealism to Blanda, a whore, in Heywood's The English Traveller: "To affect one and despise all other, becomes the precise Matron, not the Prostitute; the loyall Wife, not the loose Wanton."⁵⁴ Desdemona avouches her constancy

⁵⁰ Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, ed. by John Dover Wilson and George Ian Duthie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), III.ii.10.

⁵¹ Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1952), p. 228.

⁵² Middleton and Rowley, The Spanish Gipsy, IV.i.74.

⁵³ Thomas Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, in III, The Works of Thomas Middleton, IV.iv.72.

⁵⁴ Thomas Heywood, The English Traveller, in IV, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood (London: John Pearson, 1874), 20.

against Othello's accusation:

If to preserve this vessel for my lord
From any hated foul unlawful touch
Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.⁵⁵

(A dialogue between Polixenes and Hermione in The Winter's Tale - light-hearted, but full of dramatic irony - gracefully defines the changed attitude to women inherent in Protestant ideas about chaste marriage. He explains his sense of the lost innocence of his boyhood; he had not met his wife to tempt him from virtue:)

O my most sacred lady,
Temptations have since then been born to's: for
In those unfledg'd days was my wife a girl;
Your precious self had then not cross'd the eyes
Of my young play-fellow.

Hermione returns:

Grace to boot!
Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
Your queen and I are devils. Yet go on;
Th'offences we have made you do, we'll answer,
If you first sinn'd with us, and that with us
You did continue fault, and that you slipp'd not
With any but with us.⁵⁶

(As long as the so-called fault was with one woman only, his wife, she is confident that he is still innocent. The medieval she-devil is an anachronism.)

Calvin's proviso of temperance even in marriage sometimes appears. More often than not it has an ulterior motive. Touchstone's approbation of his wife's moderation in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside has an economic basis:

⁵⁵ Othello, IV.ii. 85.

⁵⁶ Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, ed. by J. H. P. Pafford, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1963), I.ii. 76.

Had her desire[s] been wanton, they'd been blameless,
 In being lawful ever; but of all creatures,
 I hold that wife a most unmatched treasure
 That can unto her fortunes fix her pleasure,
 And not unto her blood: this is like wedlock;
 The feast of marriage is not lust, but love,
 And care of the estate.⁵⁷

The adulterous Tamyra excuses herself from satisfying her husband on the grounds that "your holy friar says / All couplings in the day that touch the bed / Adulterous are, even in the married."⁵⁸

Leantio in Women Beware Women preaches that "love that's wanton must be rul'd awhile," but is unprepared for Bianca's ready acquiescence to his precept:

Think of the world, how we shall live; grow serious;
 We have been married a whole fortnight now.⁵⁹

Mrs. Low-water in No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, having 'married' - while disguised as a young gallant - Lady Goldenfleece - is not anxious to bed her bride, and remonstrates with her eagerness:

O marriage is such a serious, divine thing!
 It makes youth grave, and sweetly nips the spring.⁶⁰

Even more comic is Truewit's reproof of Morose in Epicoene, accusing him of unseemly enthusiasm for his wedding-night, though well knowing his reluctance:

A man of your head and hair should owe more to that
 reverend ceremony, and not mount the marriage-bed like a

⁵⁷ Thomas Middleton, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, in V, The Works of Thomas Middleton, II.i.45.

⁵⁸ Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, p. 155.

⁵⁹ Thomas Middleton, Women Beware Women, in VI, The Works of Thomas Middleton, III.i.166.

⁶⁰ Thomas Middleton, No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, in IV, The Works of Thomas Middleton, V.i.32.

town-bull or a mountain goat, but stay the due season and ascend it then with religion and fear.⁶¹

Occasionally, however, there is a genuine "continency" without which, according to Donne, "mariage is but a continuall fornication, sealed with an oath."⁶² Othello disclaims lustfulness as his motive for wanting Desdemona to go with him to Cyprus: "I therefore beg it not / To please the palate of my appetite."⁶³ Posthumus is stunned by Imogen's supposed frailty, remembering her chastity:

Me of my lawful pleasure she restrain'd,
And pray'd me oft forbearance: did it with
A pudency so rosy, the sweet view on't
Might well have warm'd old Saturn; that I thought her
As chaste as unsunn'd snow.⁶⁴

Her relation to him suggests Hermione's definition of the chaste wife.

Although most of the dramatists accept Puritan and Humanist attitudes to marriage, Middleton is cynical about the profession of ideals, and Chapman's philosophy is predominantly ascetic. Clermont's renunciation of marriage:

But I deny that any man doth love
Affecting wives, maid, widows, any women,⁶⁵

in favour of "friendship chaste and masculine" is congruous with Chapman's conviction of female frailty. Middleton's characters - Alsemero, and Leantio in Women Beware Women - eulogize marriage, but find corruption in it. Leantio praises:

⁶¹ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, III.v.42.

⁶² The Sermons of John Donne, II, 346.

⁶³ Othello, I.iii.261.

⁶⁴ Cymbeline, II.iv.161.

⁶⁵ George Chapman, The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, in The Works of George Chapman, p. 207.

Honest wedlock
Is like a banqueting house built in a garden,
On which the spring's chaste flowers take delight
To cast their modest odours,⁶⁶

just before discovering Bianca's faithlessness.

Middleton's cynicism deflates protestations about spirituality, both with regard to Catholic asceticism, and the joys of mutual love propounded by the Puritans. In More Dissemblers Besides Women, the figure of the Cardinal is a satire on both doctrines. The Duchess's relinquishing of her vow of single life disappoints him, because he felt that it redeemed the general frailty of her sex; his theological works based on her case will be out of date. Undaunted, he invents a new theological position for defending her chastity, which embodies Puritan thinking:

Then is woman said
To be love-chaste, knowing but one man's bed;
A mighty virtue! beside fruitfulness
Is part of the salvation of your sex;
And the true use of wedlock's time and space
Is woman's exercise for faith and grace.⁶⁷

Middleton shows how human nature can turn ideals inside out. Virtue is the fruit of self-knowledge and compassion for human weakness, not the outcome of obedience to theological dicta.

The dramatists' concern, like the Puritans', is with the practical implications of the ideal of mutual comfort. Like the preachers' also, their moral idealism is a social expedient. Unstable marriages mock Puritan ideals, but also undermine society.

⁶⁶ Middleton, Women Beware Women, III.i.89.

⁶⁷ Middleton, More Dissemblers Besides Women, IV.i.29.

Social alarmism is sometimes substituted for concern with spiritual issues, especially when it is directed against the pernicious practices of the upper classes.

(The reforms sponsored by the playwrights aim at benefiting women; women need them more. Their financial dependence and lack of opportunity to live apart from their father's, and subsequently their husband's, domination, makes them vulnerable to malpractices. Married happiness remains a myth as long as women have no freedom of choice with regard to a husband. The dramatists support the Puritans by defending women against authoritarianism.

Women in the drama rebel against the right of ownership and disposal asserted by their fathers, regardless of their own inclinations. Capulet's ultimatum comes too late: "An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend."⁶⁸ Imogen defies her father's rage at Posthumus's low birth:

It is your fault that I have lov'd Posthumus:
You bred him as my playfellow, and he is
A man worth any woman,⁶⁹

and opposes him calmly:

I beseech you sir,
Harm not yourself with your vexation,
I am senseless of your wrath; a touch more rare
Subdues all pangs, all fears.⁷⁰

Infelice and Hippolito in The Honest Whore evade her father's prohibition by a pretended death, comparable to Juliet's, but successful. The Duke is forced to relent. Brabantio's challenge to Desdemona's obedience encounters an already "divided duty":

⁶⁸ Romeo and Juliet, III.v.191.

⁶⁹ Cymbeline, I.ii.75.

⁷⁰ Ibid., I.ii.64.

As much duty as my mother show'd
 To you, preferring you before her father,
 So much I challenge, that I may profess,
 Due to the Moor my lord.⁷¹

Isabella's resignation in Women Beware Women when faced with her father's choice of the imbecile ward for her husband, "being born with that obedience, / That must submit unto a father's will, / If he command, I must of force consent,"⁷² gives way to Livia's advocacy:

I must . . .
 . . . take my niece's part, and call't injustice
 To force her love to one she never saw.

She admits that:

You may compel, out of the power of father,
 Things merely harsh to a maid's flesh and blood;
 But, when you come to love, there the soil alters,
 You're in another country⁷³

Both men and women claim that love cannot be forced, from Scarborough, the unfortunate ward in The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, to Marston's Sophonisba, protesting against the pressures of the State:

O fortunate poor maids, that are not forced
 To wed for state, nor are for state divorced!
 Whom policy of kingdoms doth not marry,
 But pure affection makes to love or vary;
 You feel no love which you dare not to show
 Nor show a love which doth not truly grow!⁷⁴

One of the main themes of the play is "The folly to enforce free

⁷¹ Othello, I.iii.186.

⁷² Middleton, Women Beware Women, II.i.86.

⁷³ Ibid., I.ii.29, I.ii.136.

⁷⁴ John Marston, The Wonder of Women, or, The Tragedy of Sophonisba, in II, The Works of John Marston, IV.i.36.

love." The Duchess of Malfi pleads for private freedom:

The birds that live i' th' field
On the wild benefit of nature, live
Happier than we, for they may choose their mates
And carol their sweet pleasures to the spring.⁷⁵

(Maria in The Family of Love repudiates her guardian's attempts to compel her affection: "Sterility and barrenness ensue / Such forced love.")⁷⁶ (Wincott's Wife in The English Traveller sees love as a natural growth:)

Love in these kindes, should not be compel'd
Forc'd, nor Perswaded; When it freely Springs,
And of it selfe, takes voluntary Roote,
It Growes, it Spreads, it Ripens, and brings foorth,
Such an Usurious Crop of timely Fruit,
As crownes a plentious Autume.⁷⁷

(The dramatists defend the woman who defies her father's rule and chooses her own partner.)

Ambition as a motive for marriage is condemned and thwarted in these plays. The dramatists expose fathers who barter their daughters' happiness for worldly wealth. Ilford in The Miseries of Enforced Marriage describes to Scarborough how most marriages are made up of an evening's bargaining between the father and the suitor.⁷⁸ Avaricious fathers are not morally fastidious. Yellowhammer in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside is not deterred by Sir Walter Whorehound's reputation:

⁷⁵ Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, III.v.18.

⁷⁶ Middleton, The Family of Love, III.i.32.

⁷⁷ Heywood, The English Traveller, p. 24.

⁷⁸ George Wilkins, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt, IX (London: Reeves and Turner, 1874), 472-474.

The knight is rich, he shall be my son-in-law;
 No matter, so the whore he keeps be wholesome,
 My daughter takes no hurt then; so let them wed:
 I'll have him sweat well ere they go to bed.⁷⁹

The penalty for his greed is the frustration of his plan and the public exposure of the suitor he favoured. At the other extreme, Sir Oliver Twilight in No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's takes the first suitor who will accept his daughter dowerless, hoping "to save his purse, and yet bestow his child."⁸⁰ Rich imbeciles are acceptable candidates. Russell in A Fair Quarrel urges Jane to use her husband's folly:

I have a lad of thousands coming in:
 Suppose he have more wealth than wit to guide it,
 Why, there's thy gains; thou keep'st the keys of all,
 Disposest all.⁸¹

Fathers provide rich wards for their daughters to marry. The dramatists expose the evil consequences of the practice of forfeiting an heir's property and person to the Crown if he inherited during minority. The Crown could sell these acquired rights in the Court of Wards, to the highest bidder. The purchaser then either married his ward to one of his children, or auctioned him back to his mother.⁸² Fabricio in Women Beware Women makes no objection to Isabella's taking a lover after her marriage, as long as he can make sure of the Ward's fortune:

You'll say the gentleman is somewhat simple
 The better for a husband, were you wise,
 For those that marry fools live ladies' lives.⁸³

⁷⁹Middleton, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, IV.i.258.

⁸⁰Middleton, No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, I.i.116.

⁸¹Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, A Fair Quarrel, in IV, The Works of Thomas Middleton, I.i.406.

⁸²Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 600.

⁸³Middleton, Women Beware Women, I.ii.80.

The father of Constanza in The Spanish Gipsy sees her flight as retribution:

We are punish'd,
 Maria, justly; covetousness to match
 Our daughter to that matchless piece of ignorance
 Our foolish ward, hath drawn this curse upon us.⁸⁴

Female wards are at their guardians' mercy. Glister in The Family of Love regards Maria as a financial asset:

Young wenches now are all o' the hoigh: we that are guardians must respect more besides titles, gold lace, person, or parts; we must have lordships and manors elsewhere as well as in the man; wealth commands all; and wealth I'll have, or else my minion shall lead apes in hell.⁸⁵

Justice Overdo in Bartholomew Fair acquired Grace by bidding for her against the Crown. She explains that: "Through a common calamity, he bought me, sir; and now he will marry me to his wife's brother, this wise gentleman, that you see; or else I must pay value o' my land."⁸⁶

(The dramatists provide women who are the victims of their parents' ambition with a wide vocabulary of stratagems for outwitting them. Ambitious suitors are gulled either by women, or by a male advocate of female freedom. Valeria in The Widow pretends to renounce her wealth, and finds that only Ricardo will marry her without it. Ilford in The Miseries of Enforced Marriage marries Scarborough's poverty-stricken sister, imagining her to be wealthy.) Lady Goldenfleece in No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's blames herself for an ambition which encouraged treachery in

⁸⁴ Middleton and Rowley, The Spanish Gipsy, II.ii.25.

⁸⁵ Middleton, The Family of Love, III.ii.105.

⁸⁶ Ben Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, ed. by E. A. Horsman, *The Revels Plays* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1960), III.v.275.

others: "I'll marry love hereafter."⁸⁷ Mendoza's mercenary motives for wooing Maria: "Faith, no great affection, but as wise men do love great women, to ennoble their blood and augment their revenue,"⁸⁸ are rewarded with frustration.

Social disapproval, uppermost in plays like A Yorkshire Tragedy, is often mingled with outrage at the degrading of the ideal of marriage. Grace in Bartholomew Fair rejects the expedient of a lover as unsatisfactory:

Though subtlety would say to me (I know) he is a fool,
and has an estate, and I might govern him, and enjoy a friend
beside. But these are not my aims; I must have a husband I
must love, or I cannot live with him.⁸⁹

(Both playwrights and Puritans campaign for women's right to choose happiness, or at least disallow another's right to ensure her unhappiness before her marriage has even begun.)

(Most of the dramatists accept the conviction of Puritans and Humanists that the greater the equality between man and woman in externals, the greater their chance of mental and emotional compatibility after marriage. Charles in A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse congratulates Frankford:)

You both adorne each other, and your hands
Me thinkes are matches; there's equality
In this faire combination; you are both Schollers,
Both young, both being descended nobly:
There's musicke in this sympathy; it carries
Comfort, and expectation of much joy.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Middleton, No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, II.i.397.

⁸⁸ John Marston, The Malcontent, in I, The Works of John Marston, III.i.313.

⁸⁹ Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, IV.iii.13.

⁹⁰ Thomas Heywood, A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse, in II, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, 95.

The fact that the joy is not realised in this case does not invalidate the ideal. (Touchstone in Eastward Ho hopes to expose the evils of his elder daughter's social ambition by matching his younger with his apprentice:

This match shall on, for I intend to prove
Which thrives the best, the mean or lofty love,
Whether fit wedlock vow'd 'twixt like and like,
Or prouder hopes, which daringly o'erstrike
Their place and means.⁹¹)

But provided difference in rank is a side issue to the genuine affection of the couple - for example with Spencer and Bess in A Fair Maid of the West, or the Prince of Florence and Laurretta in A Maidenhead Well Lost - not the occasion for worldly ambition, the dramatists are glad for love to surmount it. Their real disapproval is reserved for matches where the inequality is one of age - the young woman with the old man, discouraged both by Erasmus and the Puritans.

(The lust of an old man for a young wife is a perennial joke: medieval satire abounds in variations on the theme of Chaucer's Merchant's Tale. But like so many of the marriage dilemmas derided in popular literature, for the Humanists, and for the Puritans, it is a joke to be taken seriously in that it describes a genuine social evil. It postulates a marriage-relationship unable to fulfill the qualifications for married happiness. 'By matching with an old man, the woman is cheated of the sexual satisfaction in marriage which is as much her right as her husband's. This insistence on physical compatibility indicates the way in which the ideal of married chastity makes for emancipated attitudes to women's sexual nature and their role as wives.)

⁹¹ George Chapman, Ben Jonson, John Marston, Eastward Ho, in The Works of George Chapman, p. 455.

Women in these plays scoff at old men whose vanity allows them to court, or marry young women. Eugenia in The Old Law says:

For old men, whose great acts stand in their minds
And nothing in their bodies, do ne'er think
A woman young enough for their desire.⁹²

Such men must expect their wives to 'marry them not for love, but for the money they may inherit in an early widowhood. The infidelity of old Wincott's young wife in The English Traveller is morally indefensible but is explained by the disparity in their ages. Heywood is more outraged by her treachery to the young Geraldine, than her deception of her husband. Philippa's wish for a lover in The Widow is understandable. Francisco reminds Brandino: "You in years / Married a young maid: what does the world judge, think you?"⁹³ Martia's father declares: "I would have married her to a wealthy gentleman, / No older than myself,"⁹⁴ and laments her escape. Lord Beaufort in Anything for a Quiet Life reproves Sir Francis Cressingham for his second marriage to a young woman:

You're a man well sunk in years,
And to graft such a young blossom into your stock
Is the next way to make every carnal eye
Bespeak your injury. Troth, I pity her too;
She was not made to wither and go out
By painted fires, that yields her no more heat
Than to be lodg'd in some bleak banqueting-house
I' the dead of winter; and what follows then?
Your shame and the ruin of your children; and there's
The end of a rash bargain.⁹⁵

⁹²Middleton, The Old Law, II.ii.19.

⁹³Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, John Fletcher, The Widow, in V, The Works of Thomas Middleton, I.ii.226.

⁹⁴Ibid., II.i.162.

⁹⁵Thomas Middleton, Anything for a Quiet Life, in V, The Works of Thomas Middleton, I.i.23.

Crispinella, Marston's emancipated heroine in The Dutch Courtezan, concludes her evocation of life with an old husband: "To feel his rough skin, his summer hands and winter legs, his almost no eyes, and assuredly no teeth; and then to think what she must dream of, when she considers others' happiness and her own want,"⁹⁶ with a dismissal of Sir Lionel: "And I would marry, methinks an old man's a quiet thing."⁹⁷ In The Fawn, Hercules acknowledges his self-deception in contemplating wooing the young Dulcimet, and champions his son's suit against his own:

Methinks the young lord our Prince of Ferrara so bounteously adorned with all of grace, feature, and best shaped proportion, fair use of speech, full opportunity, and that which makes the sympathy of all, equality of heat, of years, of blood; methinks these loadstones should attract the metal of the young princess rather to the son than to the noisome, cold, and most weak side of his half-rotten father.⁹⁸

(Physical compatibility in marriage is as necessary as mental)

The same dislike of clandestine contract to be found in Puritan and Humanist writers appears in the drama. But while they regard secrecy as imprudent, they also consider de praesenti contracts as binding. Subsequent marriage with a different partner is not tolerated. The chief beneficiary from this is the woman, who may have forfeited her virginity without Church marriage (Mariana in Measure for Measure, or Mary Fitzallard in The Roaring Girl, forced into breach of contract by hostile parents); equally she may be landed with a fatherless child (Julia in A Mayden-Head Well-Lost, or Lactantio's little mistress, disguised as a Page, in More Dissemblers Besides Women). (The dramatists adopt the judgment of their time in admitting that the de praesenti

⁹⁶ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, IV.iv.22.

⁹⁷ Ibid., IV.iv.9.

⁹⁸ Marston, The Fawn, I.ii.268.

contract, followed by consummation, is sinful, but recognizing that it is nevertheless a valid legal marriage.⁹⁹ This recognition protects women against perfidious lovers, and stabilises marriage as a social institution. Fathers must claim their bastards, and husbands their wives.)¹⁰⁰

(The dramatists reinforce Puritan pressure for freedom of choice in marriage, and expose the inhumane customs which militate against it. Their principles promote women's liberty even more than men's: they want women to be released from the domination of their fathers, and protected from the ambition or treachery of their suitors. The wise choice of a husband is one step towards the equal fellowship which they postulate as the ideal of chaste marriage.)

The dramatists explore the relation of husband and wife in the light of Puritan and Humanist re-assessment of Pauline

⁹⁹ Davis P. Harding, "Elizabethan Betrothals and Measure for Measure," The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XLIX, No. 2 (1950), 143, 147, 156.

¹⁰⁰ Cohabitation after spousals, whether de praesenti, or de futuro, constituted legal marriage. Chilton Latham Powell, English Domestic Relations 1487-1653 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), p. 3. Harding, "Elizabethan Betrothals and Measure for Measure," p. 143, n. 15, points out that in 1563 the Council of Trent "decreed that any marriage not contracted in the presence of a priest and a sufficient number of witnesses was null and void," but that as England was separate from Rome by then, this had no influence on its practices. Cromwell's Marriage Act in 1653 stated the converse "that marriage should be performed by the local justices of the peace." "Luther's teachings . . . while retaining the church service as a beneficial custom, threw the emphasis upon the previous contract where in the light of actual law it belonged." Powell, English Domestic Relations 1487-1653, pp. 36, 37.

injunctions about women's obedience. The two stock figures of morality drama, the shrew (Noah's wife, John Heywood's Tib, Tom Tyler's wife), and the patient wife (variations on the theme of Grissill), are transformed from mere conventions, or abstract examples of virtue and vice, to characters moving in a social context and to some extent representative of real human beings. The element of caricature, often pronounced, has a new dramatic function instead of being a standard theatrical device. Shrews and patient wives epitomize opposing attitudes to the position of the wife in marriage, from which a golden mean may be deduced, applicable to the condition of ordinary men and women.

(The dramatists, like the writers of domestic conduct-books, concentrate on the balance of power between man and wife.) The theatre offers them the third dimension of action: precepts are modified by the day-to-day experience of married couples. Although the situations postulated and the characters involved in them are several removes from the every-day life of most husbands and wives, the questions arising from the brawls and trials on the stage are relevant to marriage in a normal context. Farce and caricature emphasise the real issues behind the comedy. Out of a medley of extreme cases the dramatists draw their conclusions about the best way of ordering domestic life for the mutual comfort of both parties; this concern allies them with Puritan and Humanist thinkers, however disparate their methods of instruction.

(The dramatists campaign for greater equality between man and wife, with the woman's obedience springing from love, and from practical expediency in the interest of domestic harmony, not from her husband's tyranny.) Diplomacy is the pass-word to success in marriage, and bunglers are blamed. Husbands are often held responsible for domestic turmoil, either because of their abuse of their wives' virtue, or because of ineptitude in handling female unruliness. The dramatists' ideal is as egalitarian as the

Humanists', and they are more explicitly feminist than the Puritans in their proposals for realising it.

The dramatists reiterate Puritan advice on beginning marriage well. They also evince the Humanist distrust of the romantic lover, on the grounds that he is preparing the way for an insubordinate wife. Birdlime remarks to Mrs. Iustiniano in Westward Ho:

I haue heard he loued you before you were marryed intyrelly, what of that? I have euer found it most true in myne owne experyence, that they which are most violent dotards before their marryage are most voluntary Coucouldees after.¹⁰¹

Sir Francis Cressingham's adulation of his young bride in Anything for a Quiet Life makes him her "pensioner", dependent on her even for his personal expenses. Mrs. Otter in Epicoene made a deposition settlement with her husband before their marriage: "Is this according to the instrument, when I married you? that I would be princess, and reign in mine own house; and you would be my subject and obey me?"¹⁰² Jonson is vehement about the absurdities of knightly homage in a bourgeois context - Puntarvolo in Every Man In his Humour rehearses a courtly pantomime to his lady on every return home.

Although slavishness before marriage incurs uxoriousness after it, the folly of the lover may be redressed by the wisdom of the husband in ensuring his position as head of the household from the start. The unnatural submission guaranteed to Margarita by Leon in Beaumont and Fletcher's Rule a Wife and Have a Wife:

¹⁰¹ Thomas Dekker and John Webster, Westward Ho, in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. by Fredson Bowers, II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), I.i.86.

¹⁰² Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, III.i.28.

Margarita You must not look to be my Mr. Sir,
 Nor talk i' th' house as though you wore the breeches,
 No, nor command in any thing.

 As I behold your duty I shall love ye.

Leon I'll be a Dog to please ye,¹⁰³

tricks her into a marriage of a different complexion. Her new husband informs her:

I am Lord of it, I rule it and all that's in't;
 You have nothing to do here, Madam:
 But as a Servant to sweep clear the Lodgings,
 And at my farther will to do me service.¹⁰⁴

Petruchio's exhaustive taming programme begins at the church door; he prescribes starvation and sleeplessness:

Thus have I politicly begun my reign,
 And 'tis my hope to end successfully.¹⁰⁵

(Men advise each other to take control on the wedding-day: Lazarillo in Blurt, Master-Constable proclaims: "Since, then, a woman's only desire is to have the reins in her own white hand, your chief practice, the very same day that you are wived, must be to get hold of these reins."¹⁰⁶ Chough, the weak-headed suitor in A Fair Quarrel takes a course in bullying as a preparation for marriage "that I may get the upper hand of my wife on the

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Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Rule a Wife and Have a Wife, in III, The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, ed. by A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 186.

104

Ibid., p. 205.

105

Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew, ed. by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), IV.i.178.

106

Thomas Middleton, Blurt, Master-Constable, in I, The Works of Thomas Middleton, III.iii.70.

wedding-day; 't must be done at first or never."¹⁰⁷ Francis Acton, in A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse, congratulates his brother-in-law on his new wife's submissive bearing; and advises bachelors:

Marke this against you marry, this one phrase:
In a good time that man both wins and wooes,
That takes his wife downe in her wedding shooes.¹⁰⁸

The Marquess in Patient Grissill, a tamer of imaginery rebellion, warns that the first symptoms of unruliness may indicate that the horse has already bolted:

Married men
That long to tame their wiues must curbe them in,
Before they need a bridle, then they'll prooue
All Grissils full of patience, full of love,

but cautions:

Yet that olde tryall must be tempered so,
Least seeking to tame them they master you.¹⁰⁹

(But wives can be as politic as husbands. Mavis tells Epicoene "Look how you manage him at first, you shall have him ever after."¹¹⁰ Strictures on how to begin form one light-hearted aspect of a genuine exploration of the different possibilities open to husband and wife in the search for harmony.) Puritan precepts receive comic punctuation.

Scorn of domestic mismanagement dominates the dramatists' treatment of the conventional shrew and patient husband. (A wife's shrewishness and determination to rule indicates her husband's ineptitude: as Vives admonished, the husband must find a tactful policy for his particular situation. Contumacious wives are seldom

¹⁰⁷ Middleton and Rowley, A Fair Quarrel, IV.i.202.

¹⁰⁸ Heywood, A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹ Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, Patient Grissill, V.ii.240.

¹¹⁰ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, IV.iii.17.

happy in mastery: domination expresses a contempt which may lead also to infidelity) Occasionally their obstreperousness is a pose assumed in order to induce masculinity in an unnaturally docile partner. (The dramatists condemn the husband for this reversal of roles more than the wife; conciliation is both politically ineffectual, and a usurpation of manhood.)

Men who abdicate their authority fail to realise that women need to feel the unrestrictive love and confidence in them that a husband who is secure in his own position can give. The submissive husband is scorned by his acquaintance, and recognizes the anomalies in his state. The Duke in The Honest Whore says of Candido and Viola:

Twere sinne all women should such husbands haue
For euery man must then be his wiues slaue.¹¹¹

This homiletic couplet, occurring at the end of the play, manifests Dekker's dramatic purpose: to comment, in the shrew and the patient husband fable, on marriage as an actual social institution. In Every Man Out of his Humour another obsequious husband, Deliro; "Let's follow and appease her, or the peace of my life is at an end," is upbraided by Macilente: "Now pease, and not peace, feed that life, whose head hangs so heauily ouer a womans manger."¹¹² Passarello, the Fool in The Malcontent, cries to Bilioso: "What a natural fool is he that would be a pair of boddice to a woman's petticoat, to be trussed and pointed to them!"¹¹³

The image of the head of the household becoming a servant is particularly potent in a society believing in a pre-ordained natural

¹¹¹ Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, in II, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, V.ii.512.

¹¹² Ben Jonson, Every Man Out of his Humour, in Ben Jonson, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), IV.ii.77.

¹¹³ Marston, The Malcontent, III.i.149.

order in the universe, of which the household was a microcosm.¹¹⁴ Sir Francis Cressingham in Anything for a Quiet Life realises that his wife's usurping of his position starts insurrection among the servants: domestic harmony is dislocated: "I do live to see two miseries; one to be commanded by my wife, the other to be censured by my slave."¹¹⁵ Young Arthur in How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, having made away a wife "that would have laid herself beneath my feet / To do me service," reaps the reward of his own unnaturalness as a husband in the domination of his second 'wife': "What, am I from a master made a slave?" Mistress Mary cures Young Arthur with his own medicine: "Be unto me as I was to my wife."¹¹⁶ In Epicoene Otter's drunken brag that his wife is his slave reverses his sober consciousness of his own thralldom:

Wife! Buz. Titivilitium. There's no such thing in nature. I confess, gentlemen, I have a cook, a laundress, a house-drudge, that serves my necessary turns and goes under that title; but he's an ass that will be so uxorious to tie his affections to one circle. . . . Wives are nasty sluttish animals.

Truewit and Clermont despise his rebellion as much as his subjection: "His humour is as tedious at last, as it was ridiculous at first."¹¹⁷ The most vehement condemnation of the unnatural interchanging of roles by husband and wife is Leon's in Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife. Although he blames women, his own conduct shows impatience of a weak husband:

¹¹⁴"An Exhortation concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," Sermons or Homilies: appointed to Be Read in the Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, p. 96: "In all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God; without the which no house, no city, no commonwealth, can continue and endure, or last."

¹¹⁵Middleton, Anything for a Quiet Life, IV.i.41.

¹¹⁶How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, pp. 81, 79, 80.

¹¹⁷Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, IV.ii.43, 133.

Ne're look so stern upon me, I am your Husband,
 But what are Husbands? read the new worlds wonders,
 Such Husbands as this monstrous world produces,
 And you will scarce find such deformities.
 They are shadows to conceal your venial virtues,
 Sails to your mills, that grind with all occasions.¹¹⁸

Shrewishness is an act of provocation: a passive response exacerbates it. Viola in The Honest Whore derides Candido:

"A womans well holp't vp with such a meacocke, I had rather haue a husband that would swaddle me thrice a day, then such a one, that will be guld twice in halfe an hower"; and his pious injunction,

Be patient: for a wife and husband
 Share but one soule between them,¹¹⁹

feeds her obsession:

I long to haue my patient husband eate vp a whole Porcupine, to the intent, the bristling quills may sticke about his lippes like a flemmish mustacho, and be shot at me.¹²⁰

Mrs. Gallipot in The Roaring Girl accuses her doting husband of knowing nothing about women:

Your love is all words; give me deeds: I cannot abide a man that's too fond over me - so cookish! Thou dost not know how to handle a woman in her kind.¹²¹

Men urge each other not to adopt this self-defeating policy. Ilford in The Miseries of Enforced Marriage observes: "Give them

¹¹⁸ Beaumont and Fletcher, Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife, p. 195.

¹¹⁹ Dekker and Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, I. v. 192. Viola identifies herself with her husband's patience only when she wants to scold the servants: "Two patient folkes in a house spoyle all the servants that euer shall come vnder them." I. v. 6.

¹²⁰ Ibid., I. ii. 87.

¹²¹ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, The Roaring Girl, in IV, The Works of Thomas Middleton, III. ii. 24.

their will, and its the marring of them."¹²² Macilente's advice to Deliro in Every Man Out of his Humour echoes Vives:

You are too amorous, too obsequious,
 And make her too assur'd, shee may command you.
 When women doubt most of their husbands loues,
 They are most louing. Husbands must take heed
 They give no gluts of kindnesse to their wiues,
 But vse them like their horses; whom they feed
 Not with a manger-full of meat together,
 But halfe a pecke at once; and keepe them so
 Still with an appetite to that they giue them.
 He that desires to haue a louing wife,
 Must bridle all the shew of that desire:
 Be kind, not amorous; nor bewraying kindnesse,
 As if loue wrought it, but considerate duty.
 " Offer no loue-rites, but let wiues still seeke them,
 " For when they come vnsought, they seldome like them.

Deliro has to face both his own inadequacy: "O, that a man were his owne man so much, / To rule himselfe thus,"¹²³ and his wife's faithlessness. His propitiation of her is an error of judgment.

The uneasiness felt by dominating wives is evident in their sexual life - often they have a lover - and in their readiness to surrender control when the novelty has worn off. Mrs. Glister's sour assertion in The Family of Love: "By this light, I think we lose part of our happiness, when we make these weathercocks our equals,"¹²⁴ is provoked by her husband's faithlessness, and brings her no satisfaction. Mrs. Low-water, in No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, dislikes commanding her husband even for one day during which time she is disguised as a man, and he as her servant. He alleges that "some wives would be glad to keep their husbands in awe all the days of their lives, and think it the best bargain that

¹²² Wilkins, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, p. 489.

¹²³ Jonson, Every Man Out of his Humour, II.iv.60, 76.

¹²⁴ Middleton, The Family of Love, II.iv.29.

e'er they made, "¹²⁵ but most of the women in these plays are not so intrepid. Although Mrs. Gallipot in The Roaring Girl gulls her husband into financing her lover, she is mortified by the latter's mercenary ardour, and happy to join Mrs. Openword, another shrew - "Sh'as a tongue will be heard further in a still morning than Saint Antling's bell"¹²⁶ - in routing the gallants and becoming a dutiful wife.' In The Honest Whore Viola's fear that her husband is genuinely mad, after she has committed him to Bedlam in a last attempt to shake his equanimity, tames her quicker than all his patience. George, the apprentice, comments:

Troth mistris, the world is altered with you, you had not wont to stand thus with a paper humblie complaining: but you're well enough seru'd: prouander prickt you, as it does many of our Cittie-wiues besides.¹²⁷

She vows: "I ha don storming now," and he advises her: "Storme no more, long no more. - This longing has made you come short of many a good thing that you might haue had from my Maister."¹²⁸ Shrewishness hinders mutual comfort. Mrs. Water-Camlet in Anything for a Quiet Life takes lessons in soft-speaking in order to win back the husband she tyrannised. In The Martial Maid Clara soothes Vitelli's alarm:

You are of so great a spirit, that I must learn
To wear your petticoat, for you will have
My breeches from me,

with her abdication:

¹²⁵ Middleton, No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, II.iii.216.

¹²⁶ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, II.i.315.

¹²⁷ Dekker and Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, V.i.8.

¹²⁸ Ibid., V.i.49, 51.

Rather from this hour
 I here abjure all actions of a man,
 And will esteem it happiness from you
 To suffer like a woman. 129

{Shrewishness is adopted for an ulterior motive by Lady Cressingham in Anything for a Quiet Life, who seeks to correct her husband's faults, and by Gwenthian in Dekker's Patient Grissill - a shrewish antithesis to Grissill, who wants to test her husband's affection. Both relinquish their usurped authority once they achieve their end. But it is worth noting that Gwenthian's surrender is only conditional: }

Sir Owen shal be her head, and is sorry has anger her head and mag it ake, but pray good Knight be not proude and triumph too much and treade her Latie downe, God vdge mee will tag her will againe doe what her can. 130

Dekker humanizes the fable of "Patient Grissill" which even in John Phillip's play - as late as 1565 - still illustrates the triumph of abstract endurance against the trials of the flesh. By introducing a shrew who tries her husband, Dekker transforms the allegory into a debate, {albeit exaggerated in its elements, on the balance of power in marriage} Grissill's suffering as a wife, and Sir Owen's as a husband, result from a human tyranny, equally unnatural in either case, not from spiritual trial. The reconciliation at the end of the play postulates the ideal of reciprocal obligation, {where the wife's obedience is a gesture of love, not of fear, and the husband's rule is sympathetic, not legalistic. All these plays show women glad to compromise in the interests of mutual happiness. }

¹²⁹ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid, in The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, ed. by A. R. Waller, VII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 214.

¹³⁰ Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, Patient Grissill, V.ii.265.

The patient woman may have more success than the patient man in soothing domestic strife. Adriana's propensity to believe the worst of her husband in The Comedy of Errors is as self-defeating as his adoption of physical violence as a remedy for her insubordination. In How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad Mrs. Arthur's patience is not in itself sufficient to reclaim Young Arthur from vice, but the recollection of it, contrasted with Mistress Mary's intractability, brings delayed repentance. Disappointingly, the conclusion of the play ignores the issue of mutual responsibility and reverts to a stock homily on the qualities of a good wife. The playwright illogically grants amnesty to the feckless husband, but condemns the whore whose disinterested intervention brought him to his senses.

Several of the plays suggest, like Erasmus's Eulalia, {that even a woman saddled with a bad husband can do something to improve him.} In How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad Mrs. Arthur contrives to rectify the effect of an extravagant husband:

My husband in this humour, well I know,
Plays but the unthrift; therefore it behoves me
To be the better housewife here at home;
To save and get, whilst he doth laugh and spend:
Though for himself he riots it at large,
My needle shall defray my household's charge.¹³¹

- a passage reminiscent of *Dod and Cleaver*:

Now seeing that God hath ioyned the wife to her husband as an helper, she must helpe him in the provision for her family, so much as lieth in her power and is meet for to doe. And indeed her industry and wisdome may doe much herein, that though her husband should bee much wanting in his duty, yet she might hold in the goale.¹³²

¹³¹ How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, p. 22.

¹³² *Dod and Cleaver*, A Godly Forme of Household Government, sig. F3.

{A tactful wife may influence her husband's character for the better, as well as counteract his habits by her own virtue.} But diplomacy is essential "in this intricate laborinth of a husband."¹³³ Bellamont in Northward Ho rebukes Mrs. Maybery for her jealousy:

Your iealousie is Idle: say this were true, it lies in the bosome of a sweete wife to draw her husband from any loose imperfection, from wenching, from Iealosie, from couitousnes, from crabbednes, which is the old mans common disease, by politicke yealding.¹³⁴

Grace in Bartholomew Fair contemplates her suitors: "You are reasonable creatures, you have understanding, and discourse. And if fate send me an understanding husband, I have no fear at all, but mine own manners shall make him a good one."¹³⁵ {She is an example of the rational, educated wife recommended by More,}

{Mutual comfort is the fruit of mutual good management}
{Although the husband may be responsible for his wife's recalcitrance she has a duty to win him to treat her well} The protest of insubordination will then be unnecessary.

{The dramatists unite with Puritans and Humanists in advocating a basically egalitarian relationship between husband and wife. The ideal is one of equal fellowship. A wife's voluntary submission from love, not fear:}

¹³³ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, III.i. 34.

¹³⁴ Thomas Dekker and John Webster, Northward Ho, in II, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, II.ii. 170.

¹³⁵ Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, IV.iii. 36.

Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
 Commits itself to yours to be directed,
 As from her lord, her governor, her king.
 Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
 Is now converted. But now I was the lord
 Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
 Queen o'er myself: and even now, but now,
 This house, these servants, and this same myself
 Are yours, 136

induces a harmony which husband and wife must both endeavour to sustain. But the wife's gift of obedience, (as Henry Smith asserted, is conditional on her husband's conduct towards her)

A husband must adhere to ethical standards with which his wife can identify. Thomasine in Michaelmas Term feels that Quomodo's cheating of Easy annuls her promise of duty:

Why am I wife to him that is no man?
 I suffer in that gentleman's confusion. 137

The recognition of Iago's villainy justifies Emilia in disobeying his command for concealment: "'Tis proper I obey him, but not now." 138 Paulina in The Winter's Tale, after cursing Leontes' cruelty, answers his taunt to Antigonus: "What! canst not rule her?" with:

From all dishonesty he can: in this -
 Unless he take the course that you have done,
 Commit me for committing honour - trust it,
 He shall not rule me. 139

Retribution falls on Antigonus for dissociating himself from his wife's sense of outrage.

136 The Merchant of Venice, III.ii.163.

137 Thomas Middleton, Michaelmas Term, in I, The Works of Thomas Middleton, II.iii.230.

138 Othello, V.ii.197.

139 The Winter's Tale, II.iii.46.

Tyranny also provokes an excusable rebellion. {Gwenthian in Patient Grissill advises the women in the audience to retain their independence;} "For tis not fid that poore womens should be kept alwaies vnder."¹⁴⁰ In The Dutch Courtezan Crispinella anatomizes the submission required of women:

To hear this word must! If our husbands be proud, we must bear his contempt; . . . where, on the contrary side - because they may, [marry] and we must - [they] care not for us.

Once married, got up his head above, a stiff, crooked, nobby, inflexible tyrannous creature he grows; then they turn like water, the more you would embrace the less you hold.¹⁴¹

Tamyra in The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois compares a husband to a conqueror turned despot, alienating the obedience of his subjects:

Having once set foot within the walls,
 And got the reins of power into their hands;
 Then do they tyrannize at their own rude swindges,
 Seize all their goods, their liberties, and lives,
 And make advantage and their lusts their laws.¹⁴²

In Every Man In his Humour Tib protests against her husband's beating her on hearsay: "Ile see, an' you may bee allow'd to make a bundle o' hempe, o' your right and lawfull wife thus, at euey cuckoldly knaues pleasure,"¹⁴³ and turns his condescension: "Why, now I see thou art honest, TIB, I receiue thee as my deare, and mortall, wife againe," into a reversal of authority: "And, I you, as my louing, and obedient husband."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, Patient Grissill, V.ii.291.

¹⁴¹ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, IV.i.33, III.i.81.

¹⁴² Chapman, The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, p. 185.

¹⁴³ Jonson, Every Man In his Humour, Folio of 1616, in III, Ben Jonson, IV.x.79.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., V.v.65.

{The legitimacy of a wife's revolt against an unprincipled or tyrannous husband underlines the loyalty of the few who refuse to rebel even under such circumstances.} Imogen, learning Posthumus's desire for her death, pledges an obedience which exposes his ignobility more devastatingly than defiance could: she prepares to kill herself:

And thou, Posthumus, thou that didst set up
My disobedience 'gainst the king my father,
And make me put into contempt the suits
Of princely fellows, shall hereafter find
It is no act of common passage, but
A strain of rareness. 145

In Othello Lodovico's wonder at Desdemona's submission after Othello strikes her: "Truly an obedient lady: / I do beseech your lordship, call her back," occasions the Moor's cynical:

Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,
And turn again, and she can weep, sir, weep;
And she's obedient, as you say, obedient;
Very obedient. Proceed you in your tears. 146

Desdemona's dissociation from Emilia's {tooth for a tooth morality,} and unconditional obedience:

Unkindness may do much;
And his unkindness may defeat my life
But never taint my love, 147

gives their relationship in the early scenes of the play a rare harmony, the recollection of which is intolerable:

When we shall meet at count,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. 148

¹⁴⁵ Cymbeline, III.iv.88.

¹⁴⁶ Othello, IV.i.243, 249.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., IV.ii.161.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., V.ii.274.

Her submission is as active in its emotional impact as another woman's rebellion.

The relation of Desdemona and Othello demonstrates how a wife's voluntary submission makes her husband ready to grant her freedom. Before jealousy corrupts him, Othello scoffs at Iago's insinuations:

'Tis not to make me jealous,
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well;
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.¹⁴⁹

Leon in Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife remits his sternness when Margarita surrenders:

I, now you strike a harmony, a true one,
When your obedience waits upon your Husband,
.....
Why now I dote upon ye, love ye dearly,
And my rough nature falls like roaring streams,
Clearly and sweetly into your embraces.

His external discipline is unnecessary now that her recognition of the proper balance between them induces a self-disciplining obedience:

Command you now, and ease me of that trouble,
I'll be as humble to you as a servant,
Bid whom you please, invite your noble friends,
They shall be welcome all, visit acquaintance,
Goe at your pleasure, now experience
Has link't you fast unto the chain of goodness.¹⁵⁰

The corollary to the successful diplomacy of a wife's willing submission lies in the efficacy of kindness in the husband who governs. Michael in Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife resolves: "Would I were married, I would find that Wisdom, / With a light

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., III.iii.187.

¹⁵⁰ Beaumont and Fletcher, Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife, p. 224.

rein to rule my Wife."¹⁵¹ Luciana urges Antipholus - the wrong one - in The Comedy of Errors to alleviate Adriana's soreness:

Comfort my sister, cheer her, call her wife;
'Tis holy sport to be a little vain
When the sweet breath of flattery conquers strife.¹⁵²

Tamyra appeals for sympathy:

If ye wish your wives
Should leave disliked things, seek it not with rage,
For that enrages; what ye give, ye have;
But use calm warnings, and kind manly means.¹⁵³

Vives would acknowledge that Petruchio's taming is ideal for some women, but that others thrive in a milder climate. The husband must know his wife's temperament before he chooses his method.

{The dramatists' egalitarian ideal for man and wife co-exists with their assumption of a natural order in the universe in which the woman must know her place. The woman must be mistress in her own sphere, as Perkins advised} Estifania gulls Michael Perez into marrying her in Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife by her imitation of the decorous wife:

I am not so ignorant, but that I know well,
How to be commanded,
And how again to make my self obey'd Sir,
.....
I hold it as indifferent in my duty,
To be his maid i'th' kitchen, or his Cook,
As in the Hall to know my self the Mistris.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁵² Shakespeare, The Comedy of Errors, ed. by R. A. Foakes, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1962), III.ii.26.

¹⁵³ Chapman, The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, pp. 185-186.

¹⁵⁴ Beaumont and Fletcher, Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife, p. 180.

A husband must not presume to meddle in his wife's demesne. Mrs. Gallipot despises her husband for his officious solicitude: "I cannot abide these apron husbands; such cotqueans!"¹⁵⁵ But although both husband and wife must recognize their own position in the order of things, there should be no legalistic assertion of rights on either side. {A husband must not treat his wife as the representative of a sex, but as an individual with feelings to be cherished and understood; she owes him the same consideration.} In The Comedy of Errors Adriana, rebelling against St. Paul's injunctions to the Ephesians: "Why should their liberty than ours be more?" holds a Euphuistic debate with her sister on the inequalities of marriage. Her intractability provokes Luciana to a confession of creed:

Why, headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe.
 There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
 But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky.
 The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls
 Are their males' subjects, and at their controls;
 Man, more divine, the master of all these,
 Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
 Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
 Of more pre-eminence than fish and fowls,
 Are masters to their females, and their lords:
 Then let your will attend on their accords.¹⁵⁶

The speech should be read in the context of Luciana's mediation between a warring husband and wife; it is not a manifesto of Shakespeare's own philosophy. To Antipholus himself Luciana's advice is different. Both sides have to learn that aggression stimulates recalcitrance. People cannot be regimented into a Pauline discipline; their feelings must lead them to it naturally.

¹⁵⁵ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, III.ii.32. Bullen, in IV, The Works of Thomas Middleton, 68, n.2, defines cotquean as "a man who meddles with affairs that should be managed by the wife."

¹⁵⁶ The Comedy of Errors, II.i.10, 15.

The final couplet of the play makes the fellowship between twin brothers the symbol of married concord:

We came into the world like brother and brother,
And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another. 157

Equal fellowship is the handmaid of domestic order. {A wife bows to her husband's authority because a household cannot have two masters.} {But complete subjection is degrading}

That childish woman
That lives a prisoner to her Husbands pleasure
Has lost her making, and becomes a beast,
Created for his use, not fellowship. 158

The dramatists accept the Puritan principle of partnership}

They should not reign as Tyrants o'er their wives.
Nor can the Women from this president
Insult, or triumph; it being aptly meant,
To teach both Sexes due equality;
And as they stand bound, to love mutually. 159

{Husband and wife have equal obligations to each other} Scarborough in The Miseries of Enforced Marriage outlines to his betrothed the duties of a wife, only to hear from her a parallel homily for husbands:

We being thus subdued, pray you know then,
As women owe a duty, so do men. 160

Tysefew in The Dutch Courtezan guarantees Crispinella independence:

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., V.i.425.

¹⁵⁸ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, The Womans Prize, or The Tamer Tam'd, in The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, ed. by A. R. Waller, VIII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 9.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁶⁰ Wilkins, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, p. 480.

"If you will be mine, you shall be your own."¹⁶¹ Desdemona assumes in Othello as much readiness to gratify her, as she feels towards him; his hesitation is a matter of surprise:

I wonder in my soul
What you could ask me, that I should deny?
Or stand so mammering on?

In granting him the solitude he asks for, she pretends to reproach him for his wilfulness in contrast to her submission:

Be it as your fancies teach you,
Whate'er you be, I am obedient.¹⁶²

{Mutual comfort means mutual co-operation.}

The most interesting comment on the whole controversy about a wife's obedience is Shakespeare's in The Taming of the Shrew. Katharine's rebuke, in her new-found obedience, of the perversity of her fellow-brides, seems, like Luciana's championing of domestic order, deceptively like an embodiment of the play's ultimate philosophy:

Fie, fie! unknit that threatening unkind brow,
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes,
To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor:
.....
Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance commits his body
To painful labour, both by sea and land;
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe,
And craves no other tribute at thy hands,
But love, fair looks, and true obedience;
.....
Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband:
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,

¹⁶¹Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, IV.i.85.

¹⁶²Othello, III.iii.69, 89.

What is she but a foul contending rebel,
 And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
 I am ashamed that women are so simple
 To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
 Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
 Where they are bound to serve, love, and obey.¹⁶³

The token of her conversion is her readiness to place her hand under her husband's foot. Yet Katharine's manifesto for the obedient wife should not be taken at face value.

The extreme positions taken up by Katharine and Petruchio - her shrewishness, his undeterred and unqualified adherence to mercenary motives for marriage,¹⁶⁴ her revolution into an obedience as absolute as St. Paul could have wished, form part of a pattern of transformation in the play. Just as Christopher Sly the beggar is transformed into a lord for the duration of the play, with a player-boy as the lady his wife - "in all obedience"¹⁶⁵ - so Katharine and Petruchio adopt the most hyperbolic postures open to man and wife in their relation to each other, as the premise for real life.

Katharine and Petruchio are players, fictions whom Shakespeare allows to assume real proportions. Their reality is as much an illusion as Christopher Sly's lordliness. In the ephemeral real world created for them in their play, reality is also tampered with. A series of transformations - Lucentio into a tutor, Hortensio into a musician, Tranio into Lucentio - undermine the characters' assumptions of what is real. Fact becomes

¹⁶³ The Taming of the Shrew, V.ii.136.

¹⁶⁴ Critics and producers find this so incongruous with romantic comedy that they assert, against all textual evidence, that Petruchio loved Katharine from the start, although it is clear that he would never have commenced his suit if he had not been assured of her wealth.

¹⁶⁵ The Taming of the Shrew, Ind.ii.107.

irrelevant. Petruchio wooes Katharine as though she were the girl she is not:

'Twas told me you were rough and coy and sullen,
And now I find report a very liar;
For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
But slow in speech; yet sweet as spring-time flowers.
Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,
Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk;
But thou with mildness entertain'st thy wooers,
With gentle conference, soft and affable.¹⁶⁶

Katharine accepts her husband's version of old Vincentio's appearance:

Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet,
Whither away, or where is thy abode?
Happy the parents of so fair a child;
Happier the man, whom favourable stars
Allot thee for his lovely bed-fellow!

Petruchio chooses to correct her:

This is a man, old, wrinkled, faded, withered,
And not a maiden, as thou say'st he is.

She accepts his judgment, not because this is the truth and the other is false, but because she has agreed to accept his judgment of what is true as the absolute truth. Whether the facts of the real world and his judgment of them concur is of no significance. She excuses herself disarmingly:

Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes,
That have been so bedazzled with the sun,
That every thing I look on seemeth green.¹⁶⁷

This cavalier sporting with reality culminates in the confrontation of the assumed Vincentio with the genuine:

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., II.i.237

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., IV.v.37, 43, 45.

Pedant [to Petruchio]: Thou liest, his father is come from Mantua,
and is here looking out at the window.
Vincentio: Art thou his father?
Pedant: Ay, sir, so his mother says, if I may
believe her.¹⁶⁸

The authentic is routed by the make-believe. Vincentio almost doubts his own identity under reiterated accusations of impersonating the man he is. In the concrete world in which these people move, so many of the characters are impersonating someone else that those who are not impersonating anyone, have as tenuous a hold on reality as those who are. And this images the truth, which is that they are all impersonating human beings in their roles as players.

In this mirage Katharine's new ideal obedience bears as fragile a relation to the actual world of human experience as her original curst shrewishness, or Christopher Sly's sudden splendour. Baptista's wondering observation: "For she is changed, as she had never been,"¹⁶⁹ strikes the central note of ambiguity in the play - the magical change of a character whose identity was a fiction. The final lines of the play, as crucial to its understanding as the last couplet in The Comedy of Errors, cast doubt on the possibility of such a transformation in the world that Christopher Sly must now re-inhabit. Hortensio, gazing after Petruchio, muses: "Now go thy ways, thou has tamed a curst shrow," but Lucentio answers him with:

'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be taméd so.¹⁷⁰

Shakespeare leaves the question open. To end the play with a return to the concreteness of Christopher Sly's beggary would mean insisting that it was only illusion which gave birth to the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., V.i.30.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., V.ii.115.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., V.ii.188.

vision of domestic order.¹⁷¹ Concluding as it does, the story of Katharine's taming allows the audience to feel that this is their own absolute factual world represented on the stage, while retaining their intellectual awareness that the humanity of the characters is momentary. Shakespeare lets the play-within-a-play usurp the real play: the audience has to take it seriously. But he casts a shadow of ambiguity across its conclusions without ever asserting categorically, by a crude reversion to the natural world, that they exist in a rarified and frangible context. Shakespeare postulates domestic harmony - the loving submission of the wife to her husband's cherishing authority - in an equivocal setting. Katharine's transformation is a miracle in the world where miracles happen, the theatre, where beggars are lords.

The concept of married chastity as expounded by the Protestant reformers, the Humanists, and the Puritans evokes new attitudes to women. Preachers discard medieval stereotypes in an effort to analyse the wife's contribution to mutual comfort. The dramatists, no longer fettered by allegory, use theological assumptions to comment on their observation of human nature, while showing that human nature itself can undermine the dicta of theology. In the questions about women and married life canvassed by the Puritans they discover a raw material for the drama of human relations rich in previously unexplored possibilities.

¹⁷¹ It seems extraordinary that so many pains have been taken to discover an 'end' for this beautifully complete play.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S LIBERTY

Protestant and Humanist attitudes may alter people's assumptions about women without exerting much influence on the actual social position of any one woman. Although these liberal ideas about women - their nature and education and marriage - permeated middle-class society through the media, among others, of the pulpit and the theatre, conservatism about their behaviour in society was in certain quarters as pronounced as it has always been. Moreover a conservative reaction was stimulated by certain changes in the social structure which genuinely advanced women's liberty; women found new outlets for their energy, and new motives for articulacy. Although jeremiads about women's license are perennial, fear that there is some good reason for alarm invigorates the stock complaints.¹ Their proliferation during this period may be explained partly as an offshoot of the new attitudes to women canvassed by the Puritans, and partly by changes in the actual social situation of women.

At the close of the sixteenth century the position of women was affected by two major, though gradual changes in the structure of society: the decline of the landed gentry and consequent breaking-down of rigid class barriers,² and the beginning

¹Carroll Camden, The Elizabethan Woman: A Panorama of English Womanhood, 1540 to 1640 (London: Cleaver-Hume Press Limited, 1952), p. 270, states that "the emergence of women as people first and as females second was rather disturbing to the social attitudes of the time," but his discussion of the point is summary.

²Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641, p. 628.

(of a capitalist economy.³/

The turn of the century witnessed the arrival in London of aristocrats and gentry intending to resuscitate failing fortunes by marriage with a merchant's daughter. Thirty years earlier this would have been a rare and, from the man's point of view, rather disgraceful union. From the last decade of the century it became a financial necessity. This obliteration of class prejudice in favour of solvency made women the instruments of social mobility. Although the initial impulse for such matches came from the aristocracy, not from the social ambition of the middle-classes,⁴ the possibility of social climbing influences women's attitudes to themselves, and to their environment; these attitudes are liberally exploited in the drama.

A wife's relation to the medieval economic structure was through her husband's membership of a gild. At her marriage her husband's right and privileges in the gild were conferred upon her, and she retained them after his death, managing in her own right the business that he bequeathed her. When in the seventeenth century the gilds became companies, they nevertheless kept some gild characteristics, and the woman's position remained more or less unchanged.⁵ Admittedly, it became less common for a woman to trade in her own right, an arrangement which during the Middle Ages had been catered for in borough law.⁶ But a married woman continued to be virtually her husbands' trading

³Alice Clark, The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century, Studies in Economic and Political Science, No. 56 (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1919), p. 10.

⁴Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641, p. 629.

⁵Clark, The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century, pp. 150-151, 158, 160.

⁶Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," in The Legacy of the Middle Ages, ed. by C. G. Crump & E. G. Jacob (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 407.

partner, running the financial side of his business, working on his premises (which would be at home, once he was a Master craftsman), selling his goods. After his death she would legally take over the business with both leases and apprentices. It is evident from indentures that for trading purposes the man and wife were one and the same. The list of businesses which women ran is amazingly varied: women were brewers, butchers, booksellers and printers, millers, chandlers, and even owned carpentry businesses and collieries!⁷ Men expected their wives to carry on the administration of their trades efficiently after their deaths. During their lives, the wife was her husband's partner in his business; in practical terms for many families the Puritan ideal had already been achieved.

Although at the beginning of the seventeenth century this situation still held, increasingly as the crafts became capitalised, family industry declined. Journeymen never qualified as master craftsmen, and they worked on their masters' premises instead of in their own home. Consequently their wives ceased to share their work, and were left at home idle. Trade associations began to exclude wives once they were no longer connected with their husbands' business: they were composed of workers with interests to forward, not representatives of family industry. Wives who had been their husbands' partners in business retreated into domesticity, or had to set up business on their own in competition with men, the opportunities for which were very limited.⁸

This withdrawal of wives from productive work on their husbands' behalf was only in its early stages at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Many wives - of shopkeepers particularly -

⁷ Clark, The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century, pp. 40-41, 39, 156, 183, 185, 194, 197-220.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 10, 41, 102, 146, 235, 298.

retained their function as helpers. But already there were sufficient women who were unable to share their husbands' work, to corrupt by their idle living those who still could. This group of parasitic leisured women seemed, to the ordinary craftsman, the symptom of a new class of competitor, able because of capital, to outstrip him in production. This competitor possessed a family of idle and extravagant female dependents who had no reverence for the existing social order, because they had no organic place in it.⁹ The old kind of craftsman conceived the threat to his own economic security as a threat also to family stability. It is against this background of incipient changes in the economic structure involving radical alterations in the position of women - alterations which have as yet been realised in only a small section of the community, and are therefore opposed fiercely by the representatives of the old order - that contemporary comment about women's license must be interpreted. To pick on the change in some women's way of life and attempt to deter others from it, is part of a larger effort to delay economic change, and perpetuate the existing social system in the face of it.

Women themselves could not remain oblivious of the developments in their environment which alarmed men. The women who still helped their husbands in their work aped the habits of those who did not - wearing fine clothes, conducting a varied social life, perhaps courting gallants. Furthermore, in a London which had become a clearing-house for aristocrats and upper gentry seeking rich brides, single middle-class women and widows had ample motive and opportunity for playing the lady and trying to raise their

⁹Clark, *ibid.*, p. 296, writes: "Once the strong hand of necessity is relaxed there has been a marked tendency in English life for the withdrawal of married women from all productive activity, and their consequent devotion to the cultivation of idle graces; the parasitic life of its women has been in fact one of the chief characteristics of the parvenu class."

social position by a good match. /

A Dutch visitor to England, Emanuel van Meteren, notices both the financial dependence on her husband, and the frivolity of the non-working middle-class woman: }

They are well-dressed, fond of taking it easy, and commonly leave the care of household matters and drudgery to their servants. They sit before their doors, decked out in fine clothes, in order to see and be seen by the passers-by. In all banquets and feasts they are shown the greatest honour All the rest of their time they employ in walking and riding, in playing at cards or otherwise, in visiting their friends and keeping company, conversing with their equals (whom they term gosseps [sic]) and their neighbours, and making merry with them at child-births, christenings, churchings (kerckganghen), and funerals; and all this with the permission and knowledge of their husbands as such is the custom. /

He adds that the husbands often remonstrate with their wives and recommend to them the industry of German or Dutch women, but to no avail.¹⁰ Another visitor, Frederick, Duke of Wirtemberg, who was in London in 1592, marvels at the finery of English women:

/ The women have much more liberty than perhaps in any other place; they also know well how to make use of it, for they go dressed out in exceedingly fine clothes, and give all their attention to their ruffs and stuffs, to such a degree indeed, that, as I am informed, many a one does not hesitate to wear velvet in the streets, which is common with them, whilst at home perhaps they have not a piece of dry bread.¹¹ /

Samuel Kiechel, a merchant of Ulm who visited England in 1585, finds the finery rather inelegant: "They are somewhat awkward in their style of dress . . . for they dress in splendid stuffs, and many a one wears three cloth gowns or petticoats, one over the other."¹²

¹⁰ William Brenchley Rye, England as Seen by Foreigners: in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First (London: John Russell Smith, 1865), pp. 72-73.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

¹² Ibid., p. 90.

Protests against female finery are at least as old as St. Paul. But from the middle of the sixteenth century the alarm of moralists focusses on two aspects of the evil, both closely related to changes in society. In the first place they are afraid that the new leisured wife of the small capitalist will dissipate her husband's carefully saved fortune, and encourage other wives who ought to be working to help their husbands, to follow her example. Secondly, preachers see the excessive finery of middle-class women as a presumptuous bid for a social status higher than they deserve. As the inter-marriage of gentry and merchants increased, the laments that women were helping to blur social distinctions had their basis in fact.

The argument that the wife's extravagant dress will ruin her husband appears in Elizabeth's "Homily against Excess of Apparel": "She doth but waste superfluously her husband's stock by sumptuousness."¹³ An anonymous satire called The Proude Wyves Pater Noster, printed in 1560, describes one woman's envy at her companions' fine clothes in Church, and her better-dressed neighbour's advice to her on how to manage her mean husband:

Yf he do not gyve you than good comferte
 Speke ye no more but than be styll
 But streyght to his wares resorte
 And therof take ye what ye wyll
 Yf he play the chorle playe ye the same,

but the husband meets his wife's importunity with:

Alacke good wyfe were thys your wyll
 For to go gay above your estate
 And wolde be glad to fulfyll
 All your desyre yf it were not to late.¹⁴

¹³"Against Excess of Apparel," Sermons or Homilies: appointed to Be Read in the Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, p. 290.

¹⁴The Proude Wyves Pater Noster: that Wolde Go Gaye, and Undyd her Husbonde and Went her Waye (London: John Kynge, 1560), sigs. Bii, Biii.

Her extravagance has already sent him bankrupt. The Puritans are full of warnings on this subject. Barnaby Rich admonishes that the good wife "is a ship onely for trade and traffique to inrich him, by which example a good woman is taught in all her endeavours to respect her husbandes profits."¹⁵ He instructs her on economy:

The vertuous woman houldeth it a matter of conscience, to attyre her selfe no more costly then may well stand with her husbandes estate and abilitie, she is loath to bring him into debt or to set him on the score for her pride and bravery.¹⁶

Gervase Markham recommends the housewife to show modesty "in her apparel and diet, both which she shall proportion according to the competency of her husband's estate and calling, making her circle rather strait than large."¹⁷

Many writers inveigh against the confusion of rank which arises from the finery of middle-class women. Van Meteren notices the affectation of breeding accompanying magnificent dress: "They are full of courtly and affected manners and words, which they take for gentility, civility and wisdom."¹⁸ Elizabeth's Homilist had warned against such folly:

Perchance some dainty dame will say and answer me, that they must do something to shew their birth and blood, to shew their husband's riches: as though nobility were chiefly seen by those things which be common to those which be most vile; as though thy husband's riches were not better bestowed than in such superfluities.¹⁹

¹⁵Rich, The Excellency of Good Women, p. 10.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁷Gervase Markham, The English Hus-wife, quoted in John Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England: A Book of Elizabethan Prose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 216.

¹⁸Rye, England as Seen by Foreigners, p. 70.

¹⁹"Against Excess of Apparel," Sermons or Homilies: appointed to Be Read in the Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, pp. 292-293.

Nashe, in an impassioned jeremiad, deplores that dress should no longer be the symbol of gentility:

England, the players' stage of gorgeous attire, the ape of all nations' superfluities, the continual masquer in outlandish habiliments, great plenty-scanting calamities art thou to await, for wanton disguising thyself against kind, and digressing from the plainness of thy ancestors. Scandalous and shameful is it, that not any in thee (fishermen and husbandmen set aside) but live above their ability and birth; that the outward habit (which in other countries is the only distinction of honour) should yield in thee no difference of persons; that all thy ancient nobility (almost), with this gorgeous prodigality, should be devoured and eaten up, and upstarts inhabit their stately palaces, who from far have fetched in this variety of pride to entrap and to spoil them?²⁰

Stephen Gosson warns husbands against pandering to the ambition of their wives:

But husbands, you marke well my sawes:
when they pretend their gentle blood,
Then they intend to make you dawes,
in vaine to spend your wealth and good.

Gentility cannot be put on with a suit of clothes:

True gentles should be lightes and guides
in modest path to simple ranke;
But these that straye so farre aside,
themselves that thus unseemlie pranke,
They are but puppets richlie dight:
True gentrie they have put to flight.²¹

A woman who feels she has married beneath herself may wish to assert her position. Vives had advised against such a match: "For why? the mind of man is noble, and will not abase it selfe, to be compared to the woman. But manye women for

²⁰ Thomas Nashe, Christs Teares over Ierusalem, quoted in Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England, p. 125.

²¹ Stephen Gosson, Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen (2nd ed.; London: Richard Johnes, 1596; reprinted at Totham: Charles Clark's private press, 1847), p. 7.

their defence when they braule and chide, doe use thys armoure, for incontinentlye thou shalt heare the comparison of their nobilitie and ryches."²² Fuller states that a good wife "if of high parentage, . . . doth not so remember what she was by birth, that she forgets what she is by match."²³ There were notable cases of women who either rose by marriage, like Frances Duchess of Richmond, whose first match was with a vintner's son, but finally achieved a Duke; or Frances Howard, who married an alderman's son and "for the rest of her life . . . displayed a ferocious talent for avarice and social climbing, no doubt as compensation for this early humiliation."²⁴ It is amusing to find a Northern aristocrat, Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, warning his son of the pitfalls of alliances with the extravagant upstarts of the City:

Sootherne weomen, & those that bee bredd aboute London (in that abhominable libertie there used) are able to overthrow anie man's estate what soe he bee, both in minde (which is most) & in his fortunes. Therefore I resolved with my selfe yow shoulde marrie a countrey gentlewoman northwardes, for they bee moste vertuous & chaste and do not dreame of the libertie used abowte London.²⁵

Some women, however, used this liberty and leisure to a more serious end than simply gadding about, and tried to make a creative life of their own; they joined Puritan sects. One would think that a man whose wife identified herself actively with those who saw thrift and labour as Christian virtue²⁶ would have felt

²²Vives, The Office and Duetie of an Husband, sig. Kij^v.

²³Wise Words and Quaint Counsels of Thomas Fuller, selected and arranged by Augustus Jessopp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 239.

²⁴Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641, pp. 660, 630.

²⁵National Library of Wales, Wynn MSS. 2855, quoted in Stone, ibid., p. 610.

²⁶Christopher Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), p. 132.

relieved rather than alarmed. Instead, men interpreted this, perhaps accurately, as a dangerous bid for independence.

The membership of the Separatist sects boasted such a large number of women, and so many women flocked to hear Puritan sermons,²⁷ that it is worth asking what the sects could offer them. The first attraction was the equality they enjoyed with the male members; women were admitted on equal terms with men, their spiritual equality with them was insisted upon,²⁸ and they took an equal share in the government of the sect.²⁹ Secondly they tasted intellectual liberty from their husbands: the stimulus of theological discussion. Furthermore, the sects taught that "when the direct issue presented itself - obedience to one's husband or obedience to one's church - . . . the church had to come first." The more extreme sects, like the Family of Love and the Anabaptists, even encouraged women to regard marriage with an unregenerate husband as invalid. Hence the reputation for loose living and domestic anarchy which these groups acquired.³⁰ Women took their strictures so seriously that a number of them followed the example of Anne Locke in abandoning unsympathetic spouses, and going to join the Protestant community in Geneva.³¹ Not to be outdone, those who stayed at home protested so militantly against the suppression of Puritans that they even went to prison

²⁷ William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, or, The Way to the New Jerusalem as Set Forth in Pulpit and Press from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton, 1570-1643 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), p. 34.

²⁸ Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," p. 44.

²⁹ Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement, p. 379.

³⁰ Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," pp. 52, 49.

³¹ Patrick Collinson, "The Role of Women in the English Reformation illustrated by the Life and Friendships of Anne Locke," Studies in Church History, II, 265.

for their activities.³²

Men felt that their wives' membership of the Puritan sects had far-reaching social implications. Sectarian insistence on liberty of conscience seemed a fostering of rebellion both inside and outside the home. John Brinsley asks:

Let it be inquired with what warrant the Wife, who is under subjection, can upon a like pretext desert that Church, whereof her Husband is a Member . . . and ingage her self by Covenant unto another, and that without his consent, if not against it.³³

It will be impossible to control such women: "Their spirits will not stoop to any kinde of subjection, specially to their Husbands, . . . No, they are resolved they will have their wills."³⁴

Katherine Chidley's retort did not inspire confidence:

I pray you tell me what authority [the] unbelieving husband hath over the conscience of his believing wife; it is true he hath authority over her in bodily and civil respects, but not to be a lord over her conscience.³⁵

Women preachers went one step further in insubordination. Hooker pontificates that "to make women teachers in the house of God were a gross absurdity, seeing the Apostle hath said, 'I permit not a woman to teach'; and again, 'Let your women in churches be silent.'"³⁶ The New Englander Hugh Peters accosted Anne Hutchinson with:

³² Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement, p. 93.

³³ John Brinsley, A Looking-Glasse for Good Women (London: John Field for Ralph Smith, 1645), p. 42.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

³⁵ K. Chidley, The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ, p. 26, quoted in Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," p. 52.

³⁶ The Works of Richard Hooker, II, 359.

You have stepped out of your place; you have rather been a husband than a wife, and a preacher than a hearer; and a magistrate than a subject, and so you have thought to carry all things in Church and Commonwealth, as you would.³⁷

Beneath the rational judgment of the Puritan divines that the submission of the wife to her husband's understanding rule makes for happiness, lurks the fear that women will take the principle of equality too literally, perhaps even as far as civil disobedience. Certainly Sectarian attitudes to women were emancipating, though short-lived in their influence.³⁸ Belonging to a Sect was one way in which women could have a voice outside their own home and assert their independence from, and their right to equality as human beings with, their husbands.

This bid for a measure of emancipation by women, of which their Separatist activity formed one aspect, was symbolised by the fad of wearing men's clothes. It is the obvious accompaniment of women's sense that attitudes to them are in a state of transition, and may have its counterpart in men's effeminacy. A writer on costume speculates that perhaps "the ideal of any 'emancipated' age is necessarily a creature half man and half woman."³⁹ In the early seventeenth century the tendency was stimulated by the acknowledged homosexuality of James I and his Court. Barnaby Rich upbraided them for the depravity of their dress:

And from whence commeth this wearing and this imbrodering of long lockes, this curiositie that is used

³⁷ Antinomianism in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay 1636-1638, ed. by C. F. Adams, quoted in Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," p. 49.

³⁸ Thomas, ibid., pp. 55-56.

³⁹ James Laver, Dress: How and Why Fashions in Men's and Women's Clothes Have Changed during the Past Two Hundred Years (London: John Murray, 1950), pp. 30-31.

amongst men in freziling and curling of their hayre? this gentlewoman-like starcht bands, so be edged, and be laced, fitter for Mayd Marion in a Moris dance, then for him that hath either spirit or courage that should be in a gentleman?⁴⁰

More alarmist were the protests against masculine women, and this may have arisen from a consciousness that the position of women, and women's own attitudes to their position, were changing.

William Harrison in his Description of England complains about the 'half-man and half-woman' phenomenon: "I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women. Thus it is now come to pass, that women are become men, and men transformed into monsters."⁴¹ In a letter dated 1620 John Chamberlain wrote:

Yesterday the bishop of London called together all his clergie about this towne, and told them he had expresse commandment from the King to will them to inveigh vehemently against the insolencie of our women, and theyre wearing of brode brimed hats, pointed dublets, theyre hayre cut short or shorne, and some of them stilettos or poniards, and such other trinckets of like moment.⁴²

A more comprehensive attack was launched in a pamphlet entitled Hic Mulier: or, the Man-Woman: being a Medicine to Cure the

⁴⁰ Barnaby Rich, The Honestie of This Age: proving by Good Circumstance that the World was Never Honest till Now, with an introduction and notes by Peter Cunningham (London: reprinted for the Percy Society by T. Richards, 1844), p. 50.

⁴¹ William Harrison, Description of England, in Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England, p. 125.

⁴² Edward Phillips Statham, A Jacobean Letter-Writer: The Life and Times of John Chamberlain, pp. 182-183, quoted in Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, Huntington Library Publications (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), p. 493.

Coltish Disease of the Stagers in the Masculine-Feminines of our Times. The writer upbraids such women for being "most Masculine, most mankinde, and most monstrous."⁴³ Their exhibitionist dress is aimed at inciting lust: "exchanging the modest attire of the comely Hood, Cawle, Coyfe, handsome Dresse or Kerchiefe, to the cloudy Ruffianly broad-brim'd Hat, and wanton Feather, the modest upper parts of a concealing straight gowne, to the loose, lascivious open embracement of a French dublet." But his prime objection is to the masculine behaviour which accompanies such clothes:

Man-like . . . in every condition: man in body by attyre, man in behaviour by rude complement, man in nature by aptnesse to anger, man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons man in using weapons: And in briefe, so much man in all things, that they are neither men, nor women, but iust good for nothing.

He ascribes the excess to too much liberty, and too much money, and advises stricter discipline in the home:

To you therefore that are Fathers, Husbands, or Sustainers of these new Hermaphrodites, belongs the awe of Imposthume Doe you but hold close your liberall hands, or take a strict account of the imployment of the treasure you give to their necessarie maintenance.⁴⁴

What is significant is that this invective did not go unanswered. Women rose to their own defence in two pamphlets - one called Haec-Vir: or The Womanish-Man: being an Answer to a late Booke intituled Hic-Mulier, the other, Mulde Sacke: or The Apologie of Hic Mulier: to the Late Declamation against Her. Both pamphlets provide important evidence of how women saw their own position, and of the articulacy with which they were

⁴³ Hic Mulier: or The Man-Woman: being a Medicine to Cure the Coltish Disease of the Stagers in the Masculine-Feminines of our Times (n.p., 1620), sig. A3.

⁴⁴ Ibid, sigs. A4-A4^v, B2, C2^v.

able to defend themselves.

The writer of Mulde Sacke argues that clothes have nothing to do with whether a woman is behaving mannishly or not. Improper masculinity in a woman consists in usurping her position in the household:

He therefore is an effeminate man, that transfers his birth-right upon his Daughter or Wife. . . . Shee then, that dare presume to over-rule her Husband . . . although shee neither paint, cut her haire, or be deformed with new invented fashions, is notwithstanding Hic Mulier.⁴⁵

In addition, improper use of leisure and money makes an unnatural woman, worthy the title of Hic Mulier: "She that spends more upon delicate cheere, or entertainment of a Sweet-heart, in a moneth, then her Husband may allow her for a year, is Hic Muller. She who sitteth agossipping till she be drunke, is, Hic Mulier." In effect, the pamphlet is a summary of the different ways in which women degrade their sex, and it emphasises that this is a more basic issue than the question of their clothes. Properly Hic Mulier and Haec Vir are terms applicable only "to the weakest of women and the most foolish of men." The pamphlet concludes that men are to blame if women step out of their place:

I doe advise all such that may come under the name of Haec Vir, or (who misgovernes themselves, and are the stumbling blocks whereupon others fall,) first remove those misty clouds of darkenesse, that nowe over-shadowes their owne sight, and then boldly presume to clear the eyes of others; that they goe before us in imbracing of vertue, and shunning of vice, and by good education enter us in the pathes of modestie, from which now we are estranged: and then (without doubt) we that are the weaker Vessels (now onely misse-led by the over-sight of carelesse Parents, or indulgence of effeminate husbands are let loose to all

⁴⁵ Mulde Sacke: or The Apologie of Hic Mulier: to the Late Declamation against Her (London: Richard Meigher, 1620), sigs. B1^v-B2.

licentiousnesse) shall in short time cast off all such deformities.⁴⁶

Much more revolutionary in its language and implications is Haec Vir. This pamphlet consists of a dialogue between "Haec-Vir the Womanish Man, and Hic-Mulier the Man-Woman."

Although Hic Mulier scoffs at the conservatism of her opponents:

Nor do I in my delight of change otherwise then as the whole world doth, or as becommeth a daughter of the world to doe. For what is the world, but a very shop or warehouse of change? Sometimes Winter, sometimes Summer And will you have poore woman such a fixed Starre, that shee shall not so much as move or twinkle in her owne Spheare?⁴⁷

she aims at more than a justification of women's wearing men's clothes. She argues:

You condemne me of Unnaturalnesse, in forsaking my creation, and contemning custome. How doe I forsake my creation, that doe all the rights and offices due to my Creation. I was created free, born free, and live free: what lets me then so to spinne out my time, that I may dye free?

This is the Leveller principle. She dismisses the claims of custom with "I might instance in a thousand things that onely Custome and not Reason hath approved," and enlarges on her creed of equality:

We are as free-borne as Men, have as free election, and as free spirits, we are compounded of like parts, and may with like liberty make benefit of our creations: my countenance shal smile on the worthy and frowne on the ignoble, . . . I will heare the Wise, and bee deafe to Ideots, . . . If this bee barbarous, let me leave the Citie, and live with creatures of like simplicity.

⁴⁶ Ibid, sigs. B2, C3^v, D3-D3^v.

⁴⁷ Haec-Vir: or The Womanish-Man: being an Answer to a Late Booke intituled Hic-Mulier (n.p., 1620), sig. B1^v.

When Haec Vir argues that women have different qualities from men, she retorts that if this is indeed true, "what could we poore weake women, doe lesse (being farre too weake by force to fetch backe those spoiles you have uniustly taken from us) then to gather up those garments you have proudly cast away, and therewith to cloath both our bodies and our mindes; since no other meanes was left us to continue our names, and to support a difference?" She concludes that if men re-assume manhood, women will re-assume femininity:

Be men in shape, men in shew, men in words, men in actions, men in counsell, men in example: then will we love and serve you; then will wee heare and obey you.⁴⁸

Haec Vir capitulates.

The pamphlet is interesting as an articulate and logical statement by women of equality with men. Women's determination to assess their own place in society and to demand recognition for themselves as people on equal terms with men, may spring from Puritan influence, or from economic and social change; whatever its origin, it focusses men's attention on the whole question of liberty.

The two social phenomena which affect the position of women - the breaking-down of the class barrier between gentry and merchants, and the retreat of women from productive labour in the home because of the growth of capitalism - are reflected in the drama. The dramatists' attitude to women ambitious to improve their social status by marriage, and to upstart women of leisure, supplements the liberal attitudes to women in the plays which derive

⁴⁸ Ibid, sigs. B1^v-B2, B2^v, B3, C2^v, C3^v.

from Puritan and Humanist influence. The playwrights point out the pernicious effect of these women's license on the social order, and assert values which combine respect for the old type of craftsman and the working family with Puritan ideals of thrift and industry. There are many examples of women who help their husbands in their trades - Viola in The Honest Whore, Mrs. Mulligrub in The Dutch Courtezan, Eyre's wife in The Shoemakers' Holiday; the dramatists' satire is against the idle women whose habits exert a corrupting influence on those who ought to be industrious.

It is a mistake, however, to assume without question as critics sometimes do, that Jacobean drama is cynical about women and derisive about citizen's wives. Not only does this view ignore the substantial evidence in the drama of Puritan and Humanist attitudes to women, but it also misrepresents the tone and direction of the satire itself. Admittedly, women are ridiculed and reprimanded for licentiousness and extravagance, but men are scorned for allowing them to get so out of control. As for social ambition, the men in these plays are, if anything, more avaricious and presumptuous than the women. What is discovered and exploited is the comic potential of class consciousness.

Women's sumptuousness, while abhorred as a means of ruining their husbands financially, is seen in a larger context of domestic rebellion. The shrewish Lady Cressingham in Anything for a Quiet Life orders fine clothes as a gesture of defiance:

The rich stuff[s] which my husband bought of you, the works of them are too common; I have got a Dutch painter to draw patterns, which I'll have sent to your factors, as in Italy, at Florence, and Ragusa, where these stuffs are woven, to have pieces made for mine own wearing, of a new invention.

When informed that it will be "somewhat chargeable" she retorts:

"Chargeable? what of that?"⁴⁹ Patience is urged on Philippa, the wife in The Widow whose undutifulness nearly leads to infidelity:

You know you have a kirtle every year,
And 'tis within two months of the time now;
The velvet's coming over: pray be milder.⁵⁰

In A Chaste Maid in Cheapside Mrs. Allwit's christening-feast epitomises indifference to her husband's, as well as her own, respectability:

A lady lies not in like her; there's her embossings,
Embroiderings, spanglings, and I know not what,
As if she lay with all the gaudy-shops
In Gresham's Burse about her.⁵¹

But he is implicated in her guilt for his servile acceptance of its remunerativeness: "Had this been all my cost now, I'd been beggar'd; / These women have no consciences at sweetmeats."⁵²

Women revel in their freedom. The wives in Westward Ho declare that "the Iest shal be a stock to maintain vs and our pewfellowes in laughing at christnings, cryings out, and vpsittings this twelue month."⁵³ The Widow in The Puritaine eulogises her husband: "I had keyes of all, kept all, receiu'd all, had money in my purse, spent what I would, went abroad when I would, came home when I would, and did all what I would."⁵⁴ The "collegiates" in Epicoene advise the new bride: "Let him allow you your coach and four horses, your woman, your chambermaid, your page,

⁴⁹Middleton, Anything for a Quiet Life, in V, Works, I.i.293, 301.

⁵⁰Middleton, Jonson and Fletcher, The Widow, in V, Works, I.i.155.

⁵¹Middleton, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, in V, Works, I.ii.31.

⁵²Ibid., III.ii.61.

⁵³Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, in II, Works, V.i.171.

⁵⁴The Puritaine or The Widdow of Watling-Streete, I.i.109.

your gentleman-usher, your French cook, and four grooms."⁵⁵

Maria commands Petruchio in The Tamer Tam'd:

Let me have six gold laces, broad and massy,
And betwixt ev'ry lace a rich Embroydry,
Line the Gown through with Plush perfum'd, and purffle
All the Sleeves down with Pearl.

Maria's lavishness confirms Petruchio's fear: it indicates general license:

As I expected: Liberty and clothes,
When, and in what way she will: continual moneys,
Company, and all the house at her dispose;
.
New Coaches, and some buildings, she appoints here;
Hangings, and Hunting-horses; and for Plate
And Jewels for her private use, I take it
Two thousand pound in present.⁵⁶

But the dramatist derides Petruchio's alarmism more than Maria's intractability; the message of the play is egalitarian. In several plays - perhaps written with an eye to the women in the audience who had asserted their liberty sufficiently to be there - male anxiety about female extravagance is exposed as exaggerated folly. Truewit intimidates Morose in Epicoene by depicting his wife spending his money "while she feels not how the land drops away, nor the acres melt, nor foresees the change when the mercer has your woods for her velvets."⁵⁷ Morose's sounding of his prospective bride is along the same lines:

How will you be able, lady, with this frugality of speech,
to give the manifold (but necessary) instructions for that
bodice, these sleeves, those skirts, this cut, that stitch,
this embroidery, that lace, this wire, those knots, that ruff,

⁵⁵ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, IV.iii.19.

⁵⁶ Beaumont and Fletcher, The Womans Prize, or The Tamer Tam'd, in VIII, Works, 46, 38-39.

⁵⁷ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, II.ii.104.

those roses, this girdle, that fan, the t'other scarf, these gloves?⁵⁸

In Westward Ho Iustiniano, disguised, instructs Mrs. Honysuckle how to elude her husband, using arguments that he thinks would appeal to any woman:

You must to the pawne to buy Lawne: to Saint Martins for Lace; to the Garden: to the Glasse-house; to your Gossips: to the Powlters: else take out an old ruffe, and go to your Sempsters: excuses? Why, they are more ripe then medlars at Christmas.⁵⁹

But this is another manifestation of his fanatically suspicious nature. Satire is certainly not directed solely against women.

This is equally true of the dramatists' observation of social climbing. Affectation of breeding, as Vives suggested, tends to be women's prerogative, because when they are not working - as with the wife of the new capitalist - they have leisure to perfect it. But ambition is equally distributed between both sexes.

Middle-class women - citizen's wives and daughters - try to dress and talk like ladies: a phenomenon observed by Van Meteren. They would delight in Barnaby Rich's lament that "wee canne hardly knowe . . . a Lady from a Landresse."⁶⁰ Lipsalve in The Family of Love compliments Mrs. Purge: "If she would wear but the standing collar and her things in fashion, our ladies in the court were but brown sugar-candy, as gross as grocery to her."⁶¹ Littlewit in Bartholomew Fair rejoices that dress has obliterated his wife's humble origins: "This cap does convince!

⁵⁸ Ibid., II.v.74.

⁵⁹ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, II.i.214.

⁶⁰ Rich, The Honestie of this Age, p. 65.

⁶¹ Middleton, The Family of Love, in III, Works, II.iii.46.

You'd not have worn it, Win, nor have had it in velvet, but a rough country beaver, with a copper-band, like the coney-skin woman of Budge-row?"⁶² Hellgill uses the same means in Michaelmas Term to assure the Country Wench that she will pass for a Lady:

What base birth does not raiment make glorious? and what glorious births do not rags make infamous? Why should not a woman confess what she is now, since the finest are but deluding shadows, begot between tirewomen and tailors?⁶³

Birdlime in Westward Ho comments on the collapse of class distinction in women's dress:

Ther is equality inough betweene a Lady and a Citty dame, if their haire be but of a colour: name you any one thing that your cittizens wife coms short of to your Lady. They haue as pure Linnen, as choyce painting, loue greene Geese in spring, Mallard and Teale in the fall, and Woodcocke in winter.⁶⁴

Doll, the whore in Northward Ho, exploits the same principle when, in her role as Lady, she upbraids the Drawer for not recognizing her breeding by her clothes: "Is euery one that swims in a Taffatie gowne Lettis for your lippes?"⁶⁵

Women assiduously cultivate a genteel vocabulary - the equivalent of an Oxford accent - and are susceptible to a fine phrase. The Jeweller's Wife in The Phoenix is seduced by the title of 'Lady'. Mrs. Mulligrub in The Dutch Courtezan recalls: "I was a gentlewoman by my sister's side - I can tell ye so methodically. Methodically: I wonder where I got that word?"⁶⁶

⁶² Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, I.i.20.

⁶³ Middleton, Michaelmas Term, in I, Works, III.i.2.

⁶⁴ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, I.i.24.

⁶⁵ Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, in II, Works, I.ii.44.

⁶⁶ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, in II, Works, III.iii.59.

Mrs. Otter in Epicoene informs Dauphine and Truewit that "he departed straight, I can resolve you." Dauphine comments: "What an excellent choice phrase this lady expresses in," and Truewit replies: "O sir, she is the only authentical courtier, that is not naturally bred one, in the city."⁶⁷ The ladies in Poetaster warn Chloe against "your cittie mannerly word (forsooth) vse it not too often in any case."⁶⁸

Married women are conscious of their social status because they realise that up to a point, the marriage market being so booming, they can choose what it is to be. Consequently citizen's wives boast of having married beneath them. Chloe in Poetaster revenges her exclusion by genuine ladies, on her husband:

You know what you were before I married you; I was a gentlewoman borne I; I lost all my friends to be a citizens wife; because I heard, indeed, they kept their wiues as fine as ladies; and that wee might rule our husbands, like ladies, and doe what wee listed; doe you thinke I would haue married you, else?⁶⁹

Mrs. Otter makes her husband out a social climber for marrying her: "Who graces you with courtiers or great personages to speak to you out of their coaches and come home to your house? Were you ever so much as look'd upon by a lord or a lady before I married you?"⁷⁰ Mrs. Mulligrub congratulates herself on not appearing to disadvantage in spite of her middle-classness:

Thus 'tis to have a good education, and to be brought up in a tavern. I do keep as gallant and as good company, though I say it, as any she in London. . . . Nay, though my husband

⁶⁷ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, III.ii.23.

⁶⁸ Ben Jonson, Poetaster, in IV, Ben Jonson, IV.i.33.

⁶⁹ Ibid., II.i.28.

⁷⁰ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, III.i.39.

be a citizen, and's cap's made of wool, yet I ha' wit, and
can see my good as soon as another.⁷¹

Mistress Merrythought in The Knight of the Burning Pestle is
equally satisfied:

You are a Gentleman Charles, and an old man, and
father of two children; and I my self (though I say it) by my
mothers side, Niece to a Worshipful Gentleman, and a
Conductor, he has been three times in his Majesties service
at Chester.⁷²

Mrs. Openwork in The Roaring Girl tries to push her attractiveness
to Goshawk, a gallant, on grounds of birth: "I came to him[her
husband] a gentlewoman born. I'll show you mine arms when you
please, sir," but he is not impressed: "I had rather see your
legs, and begin that way."⁷³ In The Phoenix the Jeweller's Wife
adopts the same technique with the Knight: "Though I stand here
a citizen's wife, I am a justice of peace's daughter," but with a
more satisfying result: "I love thee the better for thy birth."⁷⁴
Women stress the differences between themselves and those who
might otherwise be taken for their equals. Haughty in Epicoene
courts Dauphine with: "I may suffer in such a judgment as yours,
by admitting equality of rank or society with Centaur or Mavis."⁷⁵

Behind all the striving lies the double consciousness
that rich women may help poor men to rise - Mrs. Iustiniano's

⁷¹ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, III.iii.18.

⁷² Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, The Knight of the Burning Pestle, in The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, VI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 207.

⁷³ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, in IV, Works, II.i.345.

⁷⁴ Middleton, The Phoenix, in I, Works, I.v.18.

⁷⁵ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, V.ii.9.

complaint in Westward Ho "that it was my hard fortune, beeing so well brought vp, hauing so great a portion to my marriage, to match so vnluckily. Why my husband and his whole credit is not worth my apparell";⁷⁶ secondly that not only wealth but birth is accessible to the clever bourgeois - Mrs. Touchstone's taunt to her husband in Eastward Ho: "Ay, that he [Sir Petronel Flash] is a knight, and so might you have been too, if you had been aught else than an ass."

This is where men's ambition is as obsessive as women's. It works in two directions: poor gentlemen wish to marry rich tradeswomen, whether widow or daughter, and rich tradesmen want to acquire the trappings of birth by buying or marrying land.⁷⁷ Hoard in A Trick to Catch the Old One marries a Courtesan imagining her to be a landed widow: "When I wake, I think of her lands. . . . The journey will be all, in troth, into the country; to ride to her lands in state and order following."⁷⁸ Quomodo in Michaelmas Term indulges the same dream

There are means and ways enow to hook in gentry,
Besides our deadly enmity, which thus stands,
They're busy 'bout our wives, we 'bout their lands.⁷⁹

Thomasine, his wife, claims to be able to recognize a suitor backed by land:

⁷⁶ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, I.ii.71.

⁷⁷ L. C. Knights, Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson (Chatto & Windus, 1937), pp. 101, 110. Although I am indebted to this book for its general approach to the drama, it says hardly anything about attitudes to women. On pp. 126-127 L. C. Knights notes (n. 3): "I had intended to include a chapter on the relations of men and women in the early seventeenth century, but discarded it."

⁷⁸ Middleton, A Trick to Catch the Old One, in II, The Works of Thomas Middleton, IV.iv.7.

⁷⁹ Middleton, Michaelmas Term, I.i.110.

Master Rearage has land and living; t'other but his walk i' th' street, and his snatching diet: he's able to entertain you in a fair house of his own; t'other in some nook or corner, or place us behind the cloth, like a company of puppets: at his house you shall be served curiously, sit down and eat your meat with leisure; there we must be glad to take it standing, and without either salt, cloth, or trencher, and say we are befriended too.⁸⁰

Social advancement is certainly a spur to some women in their choice of a husband. Gertrude in Eastward Ho vows that "though my father be a low-capped tradesman, yet I must be a lady; and I praise God my mother must call me madam."⁸¹ Moll in The Puritaine describes her suitor as "a fine gallant Knight, . . . hee sayes hee will Coach mee too, and well appoint mee, allow mee money to Dice with-all."⁸² Widows hope for good breeding in a second husband - Dame Pliant in The Alchemist longs for an English count, and Dame Purewit in Bartholomew Fair accepts the prognostication of a madman for her next spouse with the proviso that "it must be a gentleman madman."⁸³

But although these women are ridiculed, equal scorn is directed against impoverished knights hoping to annexe city wealth. Eyre warns his daughter in The Shoemakers' Holiday:

Be, rulde sweete Rose, th'art ripe for a man: . . . a courtier, wash, go by, stand not vppon pisherie pasherie: those silken fellowes are but painted Images, outsides, outsides Rose, their inner linings are torne: no my fine mouse, marry me with a Gentleman Grocer like my Lord Maior your Father, a Grocer is a sweete trade, Plums, Plums.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid., II.iii.64.

⁸¹ Chapman, Jonson and Marston, Eastward Ho, p. 453.

⁸² The Puritaine or The Widdow of Watling-Streete, II.i.5.

⁸³ Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, I.ii.48.

⁸⁴ Thomas Dekker, The Shoemakers' Holiday, in I, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, III.iii.38.

In Marston's What You Will Jacomo describes the chase after a widow, and although he refers to citizens' ambition, his expostulation applies equally well to the behaviour of gallants:

O ill-nursed custom!
 No sooner is the wealthy merchant dead,
 His wife left great in fair possessions,
 But giddy rumour grasps it 'twixt his teeth,
 And shakes it 'bout his ears. Then thither flock
 A rout of crazed fortunes, whose crack'd states
 Gape to be solder'd up by the rich mass
 Of the deceased labours; and now and then
 The troop of 'I beseech', and 'I protest',
 And 'Believe it, sweet', is mix'd with two or three
 Hopeful, well-stock'd, neat clothed citizens.⁸⁵

Sir Godfrey in The Puritaine advises his sister to take advantage of the demand for widows: "The world is full of fine Gallants, choyse enow, Sister, - for what should wee doe with all our Knights, I pray, but to marry riche widdowes, wealthy Cittizens widdowes, lusty faire-browd Ladies?"⁸⁶ Sir Petronel Flash in Eastward Ho, after marrying Gertrude, has to admit that "all the castles I have built with air."⁸⁷ Gallants boast of the habits which induced penury. Sir Amorous La Foole in Epicoene recounts how he "show'd myself to my friends in court and after went down to my tenants in the country and survey'd my lands, let new leases, took their money, spent it in the eye o' the land here, upon ladies."⁸⁸

The dramatists' attitude to women's extravagance and social presumption is not as one-sided as it first appears. Satire against ambitious women is balanced by condemnation of ambitious men, of whom there are plenty of examples. In both cases the

⁸⁵ Marston, What You Will, II, Works, I.i.163.

⁸⁶ The Puritaine or The Widdow of Watling-Streete, I.i.84.

⁸⁷ Chapman, Jonson and Marston, Eastward Ho, p. 460.

⁸⁸ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, I.iv.59.

dramatists exploit the comic possibilities of the situation while pursuing the more serious, and perhaps didactic, end of upholding the existing social order.

A comparable dualism is evident in the dramatists' attitude to women who join Puritan sects. They satirise sectarianism by exposing as hypocrites the women who identify themselves with it, but their condemnation of the individual woman is equivocal. They enjoy showing how unscrupulously she uses her profession of faith to further her own freedom to ignore any moral code.

During this period the dramatists' antipathy to the Puritans as the enemies of the theatre focusses on the Separatist extremists.⁸⁹

The values they propose in their plays illustrate how much they had in common with the ideals of the moderate Puritans.⁹⁰ Their depiction of female sectarians reinforces the latent feminism in their attitudes to women in general: these women run circles round the men in their lives. Their attack on sectarianism itself consists in a piquant portrayal of the way in which its most ardent

⁸⁹ Elbert N. S. Thompson, The Controversy Between the Puritans and the Stage (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), pp. 205-207, stresses the mildness of anti-Puritan satire in the drama at this time. Although the dramatists reserve their satire for the extremists, what satire there is seems to me less mild than he asserts, as, for example, in the case of Florilla in An Humorous Day's Mirth where Thompson finds "no hint of any vicious trait in her character," (p. 206).

⁹⁰ One of the reasons for this is that the moderate Puritan citizenry still made up a part of the audience; its exodus from the theatre, although continuous over a period of years, did not affect the composition of the audience significantly until after 1625. Willard Thorp, The Triumph of Realism in Elizabethan Drama, Princeton Studies in English, No. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928), p. 64.

supporters turn its ideals upside down.

Women sectarians use their religion as a licence for four different types of freedom. The first is insubordination in the home. Quarlous in Bartholomew Fair warns Winwife what to expect if he marries Dame Purecraft:

Dost thou ever think to bring thine ears or stomach to the patience of a dry grace as long as thy table-cloth; . . . or to brook the noise made, in a question of predestination, by the good labourers and painful eaters assembled together, put to 'em by the matron, your spouse; who moderates with a cup of wine, ever and anon, and a sentence out of Knox between?⁹¹

Truewit in Epicoene also tries to deter Morose from a Puritan bride:

If precise, you must feast all the silenc'd brethren once in three days; salute the sisters; entertain the whole family or wood of 'em, and hear long-winded exercises, singings, and catechizings, which you are not given to and yet must give for, to please the zealous matron your wife, who for the holy cause will cozen you over and above.⁹²

As both these admonitions suggest, women derive their intractability from going to lectures and meetings of the sect - establishing their solidarity with the other members and enjoying intellectual independence from their husbands. In Westward Ho Mrs. Honysuckle boasts: "Talke and make a noise, no matter to what purpose, I haue learn'd that with going to puritan Lectures."⁹³ Purge in The Family of Love describes how, after a meeting, women "depart, in opinion wiser than their neighbours, fraught with matter able to take down and mortify their husbands" and concludes: "I shall expect my wife anon, red-hot with zeal."

⁹¹ Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, I.iii.86.

⁹² Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, II.ii.74.

⁹³ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, I.ii.98.

Belonging to a sect is another aspect of gadding about - a frivolous way of filling up time no more productive than social visiting, and much more pernicious. Purge declares:

Well, for my part I like not this Family, nor, indeed, some kind of private lecturing that women use. Look too't, you that have such gadders to your wives! self-willed they are as children, and, i'faith, capable of not much more than they, peevish by custom, naturally fools.⁹⁴

His dismissal of women's wit boomerangs on him at the end of the play.

Men resent the intellectual freedom of wives who go to lectures and meetings, but are even more alarmed by the third freedom: the sexual license for which the sects are notorious. Religion brings a threat of social disruption by undermining the property principle in one of its major manifestations - ownership of a wife. Dryfat in The Family of Love describes the sect as:

A crew of narrow-ruffed, strait-laced, yet loose-bodied dames, with a rout of omnium-gatherums, assembled by the title of the Family of Love: which, master doctor, if they be not punished and suppressed by our club-law, each man's copyhold will become freehold, specialities will turn to generalities Their wives, the only ornaments of their houses, and of all their wares, goods, and chattel[s], the chief moveables, will be made common.⁹⁵

Sectarianism appears here as yet another indication of the breaking-up of the old social structure. Dryfat perhaps also voices a middle-class complaint against a lower-class association's⁹⁶ failure to recognize the sanctity of property ownership; significantly, objections to sectarian habits suggest class antipathy, as in Quarlous's description of the "good labourers and painful eaters".

⁹⁴ Middleton, The Family of Love, III.iii.124, 111.

⁹⁵ Ibid., V.iii.192.

⁹⁶ Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," p. 45.

The middle classes have always regarded sexual freedom in women as a sin against ownership, whether in daughter or wife.⁹⁷

The dramatists satirise the sexual license of women sectarians. Characters refer to the extremist conviction that adultery is not sinful if the husband is unregenerate. When Mrs. Glister in The Family of Love denies Club's assertion that Familists love their neighbours better than themselves, he explains: "Yes, better than themselves; for they love them better than their husbands, and husband and wife are all one; therefore, better than themselves."⁹⁸ Maquerelle in The Malcontent urges Maria to infidelity by recalling: "I have heard of a sect that maintained, when the husband was asleep the wife might lawfully entertain another man, for then her husband was as dead;"⁹⁹ Knavesby in Anything for a Quiet Life confesses to an intrigue with a "she-chamberlain that had a spice of purity," and remonstrates with his wife's strictness: "Some Familists of Amsterdam will tell you it may be done with a safe conscience."¹⁰⁰ In A Mad World, my Masters Harebrain, unaware that he has engaged a Courtesan to counsel his wife, and unable to hear her admonitions, remarks:

How earnestly she labours her,
Like a good wholesome sister of the Family.¹⁰¹

It is a double irony; Harebrain's comparison implies the genuine 'purity' of the Courtesan, while the fact of her being a whore makes the comparison an apt one from the audience's point of view,

⁹⁷ Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard," Journal of the History of Ideas, XX, No. 2 (1959), 209-213.

⁹⁸ Middleton, The Family of Love, II.iv.78.

⁹⁹ Marston, The Malcontent, in I, Works, V.ii.103.

¹⁰⁰ Middleton, Anything for a Quiet Life, II.i.35, 100.

¹⁰¹ Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, I.ii.72.

considering the sect's reputation for loose morals. Middleton is again brilliantly satirical about sectarian lasciviousness in the scene in The Family of Love where Purge, gaining access to a meeting, enters the darkened room ("We fructify best i' th' dark")¹⁰² and cuckolds himself by pretending to be his wife's lover. Even Chapman exploits the comedy in sectarian freedom. Labervele dreads that the spiritual stimulus of religion will kindle his young wife's passions:

Fair is my wife, and young and delicate,
Although too religious in the purest sort,
But pure religion being but mental stuff
And sense indeed, all for itself,
Is to be doubted, that when an object comes
Fit to her humour, she will intercept
Religious letters sent unto her mind,
And yield unto the motion of her blood.¹⁰³

He becomes aware that there is more to pure religion than mental stuff, exclaiming: "Why, every man for her sake is a Puritan. The devil I think will shortly turn Puritan, or the Puritan will turn devil."¹⁰⁴ Florilla, his wife, persuades him to watch her resisting Lemot's love-making as a trial of her virtue; Lemot grows passionate, Florilla quotes: "It is written, we must pass to perfection through all temptation, Abacuck the fourth," and her husband, hearing imperfectly, bursts out: "Abacuck! - cuck me no cucks; in a doors, I say; thieves, Puritans, murderers; in a doors, I say."¹⁰⁵

The fourth way in which women use their religious professions for their own ends is in the embezzlement of funds: Littlewit in Bartholomew Fair reminds his wife that Dame Purecraft

¹⁰² Middleton, The Family of Love, III.iii.22.

¹⁰³ Chapman, An Humorous Day's Mirth, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

"is a most elect hypocrite, and has maintain'd us all this seven year with it, like gentlefolks," and Win-the-Fight agrees that "she is not a wise wilful widow for nothing, nor a sanctified sister for a song."¹⁰⁶ Truewit warns Morose of being "cozen'd" for money for the sect. Dame Purecraft itemizes for Quarlous the financial profit that attaches to marrying her:

These seven years, I have been a wilful holy widow only to draw feasts and gifts from my entangled suitors: I am also by office, an assisting sister of the deacons, and a devourer, instead of a distributor of the alms. I am a special maker of marriages for our decayed brethren with our rich widows; for a third part of their wealth, when they are married, for the relief of the poor elect: as also our poor handsome young virgins with our wealthy bachelors, or widowers; to make them steal from their husbands, when I have confirmed them in the faith, and got all put into their custodies. And if I ha' not my bargain, they may sooner turn a scolding drab into a silent minister, than make me leave pronouncing reprobation and damnation unto them.¹⁰⁷

Sectarianism provides ample opportunities for women to advance their own interests financially.

The dramatists feel that women who have wit enough to adapt the folly of fanaticism to their own ends deserve to get away with it. Dame Purecraft is not penalised. Florilla in An Humorous Day's Mirth hoodwinks her husband, and saves her own face when Lemot turns against her, by reverting to piety:

Surely the world is full of vanity; a woman must take heed she do not hear a lewd man speak; for every woman cannot, when she is tempted, when the wicked fiend gets her into his snares, escape like me.¹⁰⁸

Mrs. Purge in The Family of Love eludes her husband's accusation of intended infidelity:

¹⁰⁶Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, I. v. 160.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., V. ii. 52.

¹⁰⁸Chapman, An Humorous Day's Mirth, p. 43.

Look in the posy of my ring: does it not tell you that we two are one flesh? and hath not fellow-feeling taught us to know one another as well by night as by day?

Purge agrees to a reconciliation on one condition - "so thou wilt promise me to come no more at the Family" - but his wife is not so easily reined in:

Truly, husband, my love must be free still to God's creatures: yea, nevertheless, preserving you still as the head of my body, I will do as the spirit shall enable me.¹⁰⁹

All these women find new liberty in sectarianism. The dramatists use their hypocrisy to deflate the religious pretension of Puritan extremists: their most zealous adherents emerge as socially and morally pernicious. But the women themselves are rather admired for their wit in gauging the extent to which religious fads can be turned to their own ends.

The dramatists' treatment of the half-man, half-woman touches on more basic issues than their portrayal of women Puritans. They recognize the fad as a symptom of women's bid for independence and equality in a man's world, and while despising frivolous rebellion for its own sake, are prepared to accept that the pose of masculinity may have a more serious end than the mere flouting of convention. It is interesting to see how their way of thinking allies them with the writers of Hic-Mulier, Haec-Vir and Mulde Sacke: an indication of the extent to which attitudes to women outside the theatre are reflected in the drama.

The playwrights are not entirely disinterested in their

¹⁰⁹ Middleton, The Family of Love, V.iii.291, 423, 425.

adoption of liberal attitudes to masculine women. At a time when all women's parts were played by boys, the issue of one sex's assuming the garments of the other touches theatrical production at its root. This was one of the grounds on which Puritans objected to the theatre.¹¹⁰ Zeal-in-the-Land Busy informs the puppet-players that "my main argument against you is, that you are an abomination: for the male, among you, putteth on the apparel of the female, and the female of the male."¹¹¹ The dramatists' defence of the man-woman is also a defence of themselves. They stress that the attitude of mind which dictates fashion in clothes is more important than the actual clothes worn. Moreover masculinity and femininity are primarily emotional and moral concepts, and either of them can exist side by side with garments which custom has assigned to its opposite. Superficially masculine women are not necessarily immodest, any more than boys in the theatre are depraved because they wear women's clothes.

Masculinity in a woman means, as the writer of Mulde Sacke argues, a repudiation of the mental and emotional attributes of womanhood. This may be accompanied by a rejection of feminine trappings, but not inevitably. Mrs. Otter's domination of her husband in Epicoene is symbolised by her pride in her "crimson satin doublet."¹¹² Follywit in A Mad World, my Masters, disguising himself as a woman, explains his indifference about the problems of "upper-bodies" by relating women's intractability and their masculine dress:

Why, the doublet serves as well as the best and is most in fashion; we're all male to th' middle; mankind from the

¹¹⁰ Thompson, The Controversy Between the Puritans and the Stage, p. 106.

¹¹¹ Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, V.v. 91.

¹¹² Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, III.ii. 66.

beaver to th' bum. 'Tis the Amazonian time; you shall have women shortly tread their husbands.¹¹³

For Jonson women's usurpation of manhood manifests itself in intellectual pretension - the conservative response to More and Erasmus on women's education. Wearing a doublet is nothing compared with the effrontery of trespassing on male learning. The collegiates in Epicoene evince masculinity in living apart from their husbands, but even more by their précieuse activity:

A new foundation, sir, here i' the town, of ladies that call themselves the collegiates, an order between courtiers and country madams, that live from their husbands, and give entertainment to all the Wits and Braveries o' the time, as they call 'em - cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or a fashion with most masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority.¹¹⁴

Women are not capable of intellectual discipline, according to Truewit, and his view is surely Jonson's:

Why, all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause; they know not why they do anything; but as they are inform'd, believe, judge, praise, condemn, love, hate, and in emulation one of another, do all these things alike.

Truewit warns Morose against More's educated wife:

She may censure poets and authors and styles, and compare 'em, Daniel with Spenser, Jonson with the t'other youth, and so forth; or be thought cunning in controversies or the very knots of divinity, and have often in her mouth the state of the question, and then skip to the mathematics or demonstration.¹¹⁵

Lady Politick Would-be in Volpone is an example of such a wife:

¹¹³ Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, III.iii.112.

¹¹⁴ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, I.i.70.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., IV.vi.56, II.ii.110.

Which o' your poets? PETRARCH? or TASSO? or DANTE?
 GVERRINI? ARIOSTO? ARETINE?
 CIECO di Hadria? I haue read them all.¹¹⁶

Madness is the most likely outcome of feeding female brains with male fodder - the lady scholar impersonated by Doll in The Alchemist:

If you but name a word, touching the Hebrew,
 Shee falls into her fit, and will discourse
 So learnedly of genealogies,
 As you would runne mad, too, to heare her, sir.¹¹⁷

For Jonson female emancipation in these fields is a threat more serious than the sporting of doublet and hose.

Although Jonson scorns female pretension to learning, he also ridicules hysterical male denunciation of masculine women. Morose's masculine, because over-riding, wife - "her masculine and loud commanding, and urging the whole family, makes him think he has married a fury"¹¹⁸ - is the reward for his misogyny. The denouement of Epicoene exposes the absurdity of the whole clothes controversy. Morose proclaims of his bride:

She is my regent already! I have married a Penthesilea,
 a Semiramis, sold my liberty to a distaffe.¹¹⁹

The Semiramis image - the virago disguised as a man in order to rule better - is virtuoso: Epicoene is a boy disguised as a virago. Jonson intertwines the social situation with the theatrical one; as a result arguments against both seem inconsequential.

In less subtle ways the other dramatists stress that modest

¹¹⁶ Ben Jonson, Volpone, or The Foxe, in V, Ben Jonson, III.iv.79.

¹¹⁷ Ben Jonson, The Alchemist, in V, Ben Jonson, II.iii.239.

¹¹⁸ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, IV.i.8.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., III.iv.51.

dress is not necessarily the accoutrement of modesty any more than mannish garments are the hall-mark of immodesty. Follywit in A Mad World, my Masters contrasts his modest companion with hoydenish women:

You shall have some so impudently aspected,
They will outcry the forehead of a man,
Make him blush first, and talk into silence;
And this is counted manly in woman:
It may hold so; sure, womanly it is not.
No;
If e'er I love, or anything move me
'Twill be a woman's simple modesty, 120

but finds that, despite her discreet manners, he has married a Courtesan. Clara in Beaumont and Fletcher's The Martial Maid - a politely obscene play about a man being brought up as a girl, and a girl as a man - rejects the so-called modest occupations of girls, consisting mainly of listening to the suits of gallants. Moll Cutpurse in The Roaring Girl is sceptical about the modest behaviour that she herself flouts:

The purity of your wench would I fain try; she seems
like Kent unconquered, and, I believe, as many wiles are in
her. . . . I am of that certain belief, there are more queans
in this town of their own making than of any man's
provoking. 121

She defends herself for keeping wild company:

Must you have
A black ill name, because ill things you know?
.
How many are whores in small ruffs and still looks!
How many chaste whose names fill Slander's books! 122

Middleton and Dekker in this play side with the writer of

¹²⁰ Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, IV.v.64.

¹²¹ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, II.i.328.

¹²² Ibid., V.i.353.

Mulde Sacke in showing that Moll's masculinity has none of the attributes that really degrade women. Sir Alexander Wengrave's horror:

Hoyda, breeches? what, will he marry a monster with two trinkets? what age is this! if the wife go in breeches the man must wear long coats like a fool,

is mere prejudice. His son sides with Moll:

Here's her worst
Sh'as a bold spirit that mingles with mankind,
But nothing else comes near it: and oftentimes
Through her apparel somewhat shames her birth;
But she is loose in nothing but in mirth:
Would all Molls were no worse. 123

Bess in Heywood's The Fair Maid of the West, like Rosalind fleeing to Arden, or Imogen to Milford Haven, adopts a masculine bearing to protect her honour; she also exposes the cowardliness behind the male braggadocio:

Let none condemne me of immodesty,
Because I trie the courage of a man
Who on my soule's a Coward. 124

Despite the dramatists' tolerance of women who wear men's clothes there is hardly a hint of the emancipated claims of Haec Vir. Moll Cutpurse comes the nearest to them in her indifference to public censure:

Perhaps for my mad going some reprove me;
I please myself, and care not else who love me. 125

She abjures marriage, as too great a loss of independence to someone no better than herself:

¹²³ Ibid., II.ii. 79, 180.

¹²⁴ Thomas Heywood, The Fair Maid of the West, or, A Girle Worth Gold, the first part, in II, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, 285.

¹²⁵ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, V.i. 360.

A Wife, you know, ought to be obedient, but I fear I am too headstrong to obey, therefore I'll ne'er go about it.
 . . . I have the head now of myself, and am man enough for a woman: marriage is but a chopping and changing, where a maiden loses one head, and has a worse i' th' place.¹²⁶

Her protest against the hypocrisies of conventional society remains an eccentricity, not a threat to the established order, which suffers her - at the end of the play - to remain within its ranks, rather than adapting itself to her values. It is an interesting and worthwhile attempt to get beyond the conservatism of Hic Mulier and see what the masculine-woman is really about; but the dramatists run no risk of promulgating ideas about female liberty radically opposed to the status quo.

The dramatists' picture of women's liberty is both more and less limited than that drawn by other contemporary writers. They underestimate the seriousness of women's protests against restrictions on their freedom of conscience made explicit in their championing of sectarianism; they give little weight to the real fear of socially subversive currents that lies behind the male reaction to the half-man, half-woman phenomenon; and they skate over the real demand for equality, perhaps even civil equality, which gives rise to this protest by women. As with their treatment of the upstart lady of leisure, their basic principle is to re-assert the existing social order against any movement of change. Nevertheless their detachment from polemics enables them to turn a judicious eye on the excesses of men and women equally. Their achievement in these plays is not the political or philosophical one of proclaiming the equality of the sexes in the teeth of reactionaries, but a humane one worthy of Erasmus, in showing them capable of equal folly.

¹²⁶ Ibid., II.ii.39.

CHAPTER V

CONVENTIONAL SATIRE ON WOMEN

No audience at a Jacobean play can fail to notice that alongside basically liberal attitudes to women there exists a wealth of stock satirical comment about them. This, moreover, is so prolific that at first sight its impact tends to be more powerful than that made by the infusion of Protestant and Humanist ideals about women into the moral texture of the play. Three questions need answers if the dramatists' attitudes to women are to be fully realised: where this stock satire originates, how it has found its way into the drama, and whether its presence in Jacobean drama is in conflict with liberal attitudes to women.

Conventional satire on women is primarily an extra-dramatic tradition bequeathed by the Middle Ages and only gradually absorbed into the theatre. Medieval satire on women was an art-form in its own right which originated in France, and provided the bourgeois counterpart to amour courtois.¹ It was

¹ Francis Lee Utley, The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1944), pp. 15-18.

highly formalised, and practised by most great writers, not, as in later times, merely by hacks.² The recurrent themes are women's inconstancy and caprice, their lasciviousness, greed and drunkenness, extravagance and love of finery. The shrewishness of wives and their desire for mastery are supplemented by advice to husbands, and bitter laughter at the simulated grief of widows.³ Artistry consists not in the manipulation of subject-matter, but in formal ingenuity.

A parallel genre of defence of women complements the satire, perhaps attracting slightly fewer participants, and often ironical. A typical example is the English The Gospelles of Dystaves, probably printed in the first decade of the sixteenth century from a French original of the late fifteenth.⁴ Its form parodies the Gospels, with six old women as Evangelists, and the writer as their secretary; his motive for taking upon himself such an office is set forth with deceptive ingenuousness. He laments the:

Demynysshynge and reprochyng of ladyes, wherefore it is grete synne and grete shame to them that so doo. For they adnychyll the grete noblesse of ladyes, and the grete goodnes that from them procedeth, for bycause that the fyrst woman was made and create in a place hyghe and noble full of clenness and fragrant aer, therfore ben all women naturally noble, honest, swete, fayre, & curteyse and full of sapyence, lyght and gentyll & so ryght sotell that it lacketh but lytell that they knowe thynges for to come.

These are the usual claims made by defenders of women. The author hides his irony while the first Evangelist introduces her Gospel:

My ryght der neyghbours, . . . ye se, & in lyke wyse

²Ibid., p. 90.

³Ibid., p. 49.

⁴Listed in Utley, ibid., Analytical Index, No. I, p. 139, No. 79.

know clerely how the men of this present tyme ceaseth not
for to wryte & make balades dyffamous and boks contagious
in dispraysnge the honour of our sexe,

but as the defence progresses the women reveal themselves as
scurrilous and lustful old crones who would justify any amount of
satirical attack. They are all Wives of Bath. The author concludes
with sly disappointment:

I began for to be moche wery of theym, bycause that to
my semyng all the wordes that they had spoken was without
reason, & without any good sentente as I thought well it
sholde be at the first begynnyng.⁵

This piece, written at the beginning of the sixteenth
century shows no sign of the changes which were beginning to
affect the tradition of satire on women. In France Christine de
Pisan had already taken up the cudgels to defend women against
her literary detractors;⁶ in England, although women were much
slower in rallying to their own defence - the first was Jane Anger
in the last quarter of the sixteenth century⁷ - changes of tone and
direction in the satire set the stage for this development.

There are three main differences between Renaissance
satire on women in England, and medieval satire in its hey-day.
In the first place - though it had always been less earnestly
vituperative than the French querelle des femmes - its sportive-
ness increased.⁸ Some of the men practising it ceased to take it

⁵ The Gospelles of Dystaves (London: Wynkynde de Worde,
[1515?]), sigs. vii, xlii-vv^v.

⁶ Lula McDowell Richardson, The Forerunners of Feminism
in French Literature of the Renaissance from Christine of Pisa
to Marie de Gournay, The Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance
Literature and Languages, XII (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns
Hopkins Press, 1929).

⁷ Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, p. 467.

⁸ Utley, The Crooked Rib, pp. 28, 70.

seriously as invective. More and Erasmus, as well as later Humanists like Agrippa, satirised women for amusement, without recognizing any conflict between the attitudes of satire and liberal attitudes to women in society. More's "A Merry Tale of a Nun and her Brother" in A Dialogue of Comfort ridicules female garrulity.⁹ In The Glory of Women Agrippa interweaves genuine praise with equivocal compliment, in the tradition of paradox, as, for example, when he compares men and women:

Since amongst all other living creatures, it is given only to man to look with countenance erect towards heaven, Nature and Fortune have respected woman chiefly in this, and are so propitious, that if by chance she falls, she almost alwayes falls upon her backe, and seldome, or never on her head or face.

His comment on her loquacity is equally two-faced:

Truly Nature it selfe, the wise disposer of all maters, in this hath wisely provided for women, that scarce at any time you shall finde a woman dumb; It is a glorious thing then to excel men, in that by which men chiefly excel other living creatures.¹⁰

For the Humanists satire on women is a literary pastime, perhaps comparable to writing epigrams.

Secondly, the formal divisions between genres became blurred. Satirists mingled praise and dispraise within the framework of one piece,¹¹ and were anxious not to be associated categorically with one or the other. Edward Gosynhyll, for example, eulogized women in his Mulierum Pean and subsequently denigrated them in The Schole House of Women - a piece which

⁹ Sir Thomas More: Selections from his English Works and from the Lives by Erasmus & Roper, ed. by P. S. & H. M. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 120.

¹⁰ Agrippa, The Glory of Women, pp. 10, 13.

¹¹ Utley, The Crooked Rib, pp. 52-53.

set in motion the only real querelle des femmes in England. What is interesting in his accusations is the augmenting of the stock complaints of satire. He stresses women's irrationality:

For let a man, to them replye
In reasonyng, of matters small
These women, be so sensuall
That by theyr reason, not worth a torde
Yet wyll the woman, have the last worde,

and asserts that education is powerless to remedy their defects:

In the woman
Is lyttell thyng, of prayse worthye
Lettred or unlerned.¹²

It seems probable that this comment, in a satire re-printed numerous times after its first appearance in 1541 - during the period when Humanism was at its most influential - represents the satirist's retort to the sponsors of female education.

This consciousness of contemporary conditions in the satirists' frame of reference marks the third development beyond the medieval tradition. Satirists and defenders alike begin to manifest an awareness that their detractions have social implications for women as people, and as individuals.¹³ Satire becomes audience-conscious, and a note of propitiation for the women in the audience is increasingly apparent. Robert Copland prefaces his satire on widows' feigned grief, The Seven Sorowes that Women Have When Theyr Husbandes Be Deade, with a dialogue between himself and 'Quidam' justifying the satire. Copland asks disarmingly:

Why should they be rayled and gested on than
And to say soth it is but a fond apetyte
To geste on women, or against them to wryte.

¹² Edward Gosynhyll, The Schole House of Women (London: John Kynge, 1560), sig. Aii^v, Diii^v lion.

¹³ Utley, The Crooked Rib, pp. 71-72, 83.

Quidam reassures him:

That is truthe, if they be good and honest
 But this is but a mery bourdyng Jeest
 Without reproufe, dishonesty or shame
 That in no wyse can appayre their good name.¹⁴

Copland proceeds with his satire but his Envoy reverts to uneasiness and conciliation:

To wydowes chefely
 Desyringe them to take it as in play
 For that to do, was myne entent truely
 Desyryng them to accept my fantasy.¹⁵

Defenders of women feel that they are rebutting charges relevant to women in society. Edward More, retorting to Gosynhyll, thinks that married men have a duty to defend women, and regrets his own bachelordom:

And more mete in dede I thought it also for a married man, who in defendyng of women myght partly gratyfy hys owne wyfe, whose honest behavyor sobernes wytt and true love theryn semyng to be apparent, myght redoune, and sounde not a lyttle to hys owne honestie; and also wolde be a greate encrease of love betwene them although they skant loved before.¹⁶

Other defenders point to the virtue of contemporary women - another innovation: medieval defence had recourse to Biblical and classical paragons. In An Apologie for Women-Kinde the author remarks "how many Schooles and Hospitalles are built / By

¹⁴ Robert Copland, The Seven Sorowes that Women Have When theyr Husbandes Be Deade (London: Wylliam Copland, [1525?]), Preface, sig. Aii^v.

¹⁵ Ibid., Lenvoy, sig. Ciiii^v,

¹⁶ Edward More, A Lytle and Bryefe Treatyse, called The Defence of Women, and Especially of Englyshe Women, made against The Schole Howse of Women (London: John Kynge, 1560), Preface, sig. Aii.

womens wondrous liberalitie."¹⁷ Anthony Gibson in his A Woman's Woorth (dedicated to the Countess of Southampton and containing dedicatory verses to each of her three maids of honour, and one to the ladies of England generally) reiterates the same point:

They use continually to visite Hospitalles, Prisons, and other places of wants, to give assistance to the miseries of men.¹⁸

Modern women are praised for their learning:

Yea at this day how many may we see,
That heere in England now still living bee,
Whose pennes and tongues (when as it is their will)
Farre doe excell each other humane skill?

The same writer concludes that men who marry:

Ought them as equals in each point t'esteeme,
And but for order them inferiours deeme,¹⁹

an illustration of Puritan ideals being enlisted to rout literary bigotry. (Nicholas Breton, in his Praise of Virtuous Ladies holds up a woman of the time as the supreme example of feminine virtue in order to prove that outstanding women achieve as much as outstanding men; tolerance should therefore be extended to less exceptional women.)

Was there ever man learned? So is she. And by his learning virtuous? No less is she. And by his virtues famous? She, as much as he. Now, though there be none such as she: yet as she is of all most excellent, so are there some other for commendation more than indifferent.

He also is impatient of "the strange discourses of diverse fantastical fellows, that have no grace but in disgracing of women,

¹⁷An Apologie for Women-Kinde (London: Edward Allde for William Ferebrand, 1605), sig.^h C1^v, pagination.

¹⁸Anthony Gibson, A Womans Woorth, defended against All the Men in the World (London: Iohn Wolfe, 1599), p. 30.

¹⁹An Apologie for Women-Kinde, sigs. D1^v, D4^v.

in invectives against them, . . . whereby . . . they seek to bring all, yea, most matrons, and almost all women in contempt."²⁰

This impatience of literary attacks on women because they poison attitudes to women in society harks back to Bullinger's jibe at "certain poets and beastly men."²¹ It also recalls the earlier protest of Humanists such as More, Vives and Ascham against the idolizing of women in medieval romance. Denigration of women has always accompanied worship of them, and to Protestants both seemed illustrative of corrupt papistical values.²² At the beginning of the seventeenth century the discarding of romantic attitudes to adulterous love - with its idolatrous attitude to women - is complemented by a dismissal of the excesses of satire against women. Donne preaches that

To make them Gods is ungodly, and to make them Devils is devillish; To make them Mistresses is unmanly, and to make them servants is unnoble; To make them as God made them, wives, is godly and manly too.²³

He makes no distinction between a literary attitude and a social one. The literary genre must be accountable to society, and particularly to the women in society.

In 1615 Joseph Swetnam, under the pseudonym Thomas Tel-troth, satirised women in a pamphlet called The Araignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women. This tract is remarkable on two counts. In the first place it roused three women to answer his attack; secondly their swift response was

²⁰Nicholas Breton, The Praise of Virtuous Ladies, ed. by Sir Egerton Brydges (Kent: printed at the private Press of Lee Priory, by Johnson and Warwick, 1815), pp. 1, 10.

²¹Above, p. 17.

²²Utley, The Crooked Rib, p. 90.

²³The Sermons of John Donne, III, 242.

the more surprising considering not only that the satire itself is run-of-the-mill stuff hardly worth taking seriously, but also that in some ways it owes more allegiance to Puritan and Humanist attitudes to women, than to those of conventional satire.

Swetnam's cynicism about Helen of Troy:

Was not that noble city of Troy sacked and spoyled for the faire Hellena, and when it had cost many mens lives and much blood was shed, and when they had got the conquest they got but an harlot,²⁴

is not in the tradition of medieval satire against women. His cynicism is directed against the attitude to women which allowed Helen to be idolized. When he concludes his satire with instructions on the relation of husband and wife he steps right out of the old tradition and takes on a social function as teacher; women may be scorned, but they also have to be lived with:

The husband must provide to satisfie the honest desires of his wife, so that neither by necessity nor superfluity be the occasion to worke her dishonour, for both want and plenty, both ease and disease makes some women often-times unchaste: and againe many times the wife seeing the husband to take no care for her, making belike this reckoning that no body else will care for her or desire her: but to conclude this point, shee onely is to be accounted honest, who having liberty to doe amisse yet doth it not.²⁵

His assumption, (despite his pose as satirist, is that women are people, some honest and some dishonest. This is a blow at the heart of satire as a genre)

Swetnam is vulnerable to counter-attack not because his satire is superlatively vituperative, but because his assumptions about women are obviously at variance with the convention in which

²⁴Thomas Tel-troth [Joseph Swetnam], The Araignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women (London: Edward Allde for Thomas Archer, 1615), p. 21.

²⁵Ibid., p. 53.

he is writing. Women seize the opportunity to expose the irrelevance of stock satirical attitudes to individuals: Constantia Munda demands:

What if you had cause to be offended with some (as I cannot excuse all) must you needs shoot your paper-pellets out of your potgun-pate at all women?

.

Why should you imploy your invention to lay open new fashions of lewdnesse, which the worst of women scarce ever were acquainted with?²⁶

Rachel Speght argues the case for women on Puritan grounds:

So the single man is by marriage changed from a Batchelour to a Husband, a farre more excellent title; from a solitarie life unto a ioyfull union and coniunction, with such a creature as God hath made for man, for whom none was meete till she was made.²⁷

Medieval satire is anachronistic. Ester Sowernam dismisses it as literary posturing:

It hath ever beene a common custome amongst Idle, and humerous Poets, Pamphleters, and Rimers, out of passionate discontents, or having little otherwise to imploy themselves about, to write some bitter Satire-Pamphlet, or Rime, against women: in which argument he who could devise any thing more bitterly, or spitefully, against our sexe hath never wanted the liking, allowance, and applause of giddy headed people.

Her claim that invective against women is a reflection on the satirist himself - "forbeare to charge women with faults which come from

²⁶ Constantia Munda (pseud.), The Worming of a Mad Dogge: or A Soppe for Cerberus the Iaylor of Hell (London: Lawrence Hayes, 1617), pp. 7, 9.

²⁷ Rachel Speght, A Mouzell for Melastomus: The Cynicall Bayter of, and Foule Mouthed Barker against Evahs Sex (London: Nicholas Okes for Thomas Archer, 1617), p. 14.

the contagion of Masculine serpents"²⁸ - is central to an understanding of satire in Jacobean drama.

The dramatists inherit a dying tradition of satire against women. The abundant residue that it leaves in their plays suggests that they found a vital function for it.

The hybrid Tudor drama is the medium through which medieval satire on women finds its way into Jacobean plays. Satirical sallies against women are increasingly common in Tudor drama as its themes become secular; yet the dramatists find difficulty in integrating these diatribes into the plays. Passages containing satire against women - even in plays about children's upbringing where it might seem appropriate - tend to read as peripheral additions retaining their non-dramatic character.

The reason for this lies in the abstract nature of the plays: action clings perilously to ideas; characters embody types - the shrew, the improvised standard human being (disobedient child or what you will). The dramatists are faced with the problem of including satirical comments about women without portraying any individuals by which their justice might be tested. Consequently diatribes about women have an extraneous, music-hall joke quality.

In the semi-allegorical Vice, however, hybrid drama provides a detached commentator whose satirical attitudes to women derive from general cynicism. As early as Heywood's

²⁸ Ester Sowernam (pseud.), Ester hath Hang'd Haman: or An Answere to a Lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Araignment of Women (London: Nicholas Bourne, 1617), pp. 31-32, 48.

Play of Love the Vice emerges as the enemy of romantic values.²⁹

In later plays his satire has a similar bearing on the main theme of the play. Conditions, the blight of romance in Common Conditions, speaks half-a-page of medieval satire on women:

It is given to women to be obscure, and full of simpriety by
the way,
Proffer them the thing they most desire, they would it denay,
They are so full of slights and fetches, that scarce the fox, he,
In every point with women may scarce compared be:
For when men pray, they will denay; or when men most desire
Then, mark me! a woman, she is soonest stirred to ire;
Their heads are fantastical, and full of variety strange,
Like to the moon, whose operation it is often times to change.
And by your leave, howsoever it goes, the mastery they must
have
In every respect, or in ought that they seem for to crave.³⁰

Haphazard, the cynical manipulator in Appius and Virginia, satirises women's talkativeness "Nay, sure I have done, when women do speak," and their love of mastery: "Lest wives wear the cod-piece!"³¹
Ill Reporte in The Most Virtuous & Godly Susanna encourages Sensualitas'and Voluptas' attempted seduction of Susanna by assuring them of women's lustfulness:

There is never a wench here,
But in her best geare
Would have flesh without bones.³²

²⁹ Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 440, 226, 294.

³⁰ Common Conditions, in Five Anonymous Plays, (Fourth Series), Early English Dramatists, ed. by John S. Farmer (London: Early English Drama Society, 1908), p. 189.

³¹ Appius and Virginia, ibid., pp. 13, 18.

³² Thomas Garter, The Most Virtuous & Godly Susanna ([London:] printed for the Malone Society by John Johnson at the Oxford University Press, 1937), lines 926, 913.

Penulo, the parasite in The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune, makes similar innuendos about lust:

I can tell what part a woman thinks tenderest to be,
And there is dear blood in it - but benedicite.³³

The Vices Ambidexter in Cambyzes and Politicke Perswasion in The Play of Patient Grissell, both warn against shrewish wives; the latter condemns wives for their extravagance:

The pride of some dames make the husband beare an empty
purse

They must be trimmed after the trickest fassion,

and concludes that "they be the craftiest cattell in Christendome or Kent."³⁴ In all these plays the Vice punctures romance and encourages lust with continuous stabs of irony and cynicism about women, sometimes addressed to a character in the play, but more often offered as an outside commentary involving the audience.³⁵

Although his satire on women is often tediously diffuse, it is both congruous with his professed nature, and more or less related to the main preoccupations of the play.

The heterogeneous cynicism of the Vice makes him the most natural mouthpiece for satire on women. When it appears without this sanction, the result is often undisciplined; in The Cobler's Prophecy satire on women's extravagance attributed to Nichol Newfangle - the Vice in Like Will to Like Quoth the Devil to the Collier - forms the substance of a debate between Venus's

³³ The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune, in Dodsley's Old English Plays, ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt, VI (London: Reeves and Turner, 1874), 210.

³⁴ John Phillip, The Play of Patient Grissell ([London:] printed for the Malone Society by Charles Whittingham & Co. at the Chiswick Press, 1909), lines 371, 433.

³⁵ Anne Richter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), pp. 54-57.

servants. The device of reported speech means that a tenuous connection with the Vice is maintained:

Quoth nicenes to new fangle thou art such a lacke,
 That thou deuisest fortie fashions for my Ladies backe.
 And thou quoth he art so possest with euerie fantike toy
 That following of my Ladies humor thou dost make hir coy.

 To day in pumps and cheuerill gloues, to walke she wilbe bold.
 To morrow cuffes and countenance for feare of catching cold.
 Now is she barefast to be seene, straight on hir muffler goes,
 Now is shee hufft vp to the crowne, straight nusled to the nose.

But the playwright cannot bring himself to leave it at that. His play is saturated with conventional denigration of women. Occasionally it rises to a certain windy rhetoric, as in Mars's condemnation of them:

You are the scum of ill, the scorne of good,
 The plague of mankinde, and the wrath of heaven,
 The cause of enuie, anger, murder, warre,
 By you the peopled towns are deserts made:
 The deserts fild with horror and distres.
 You laugh Hiena like, weepe as the Crocadile,
 One ruine brings your sorrow and your smile.³⁶

But in its context this outburst only barely fulfills a dramatic function; essentially it belongs to a non-dramatic tradition.

In a few plays, however, satire on women is introduced without recourse to the Vice, and without a dislocation of dramatic propriety. In Calisto and Melibaea scorn of women and repudiation of their charms is Sempronio's unsuccessful method of dissuading Calisto from idolising Melibaea. What he says is conventional: the novelty lies in its organic relation to the play as a whole. His cynicism about women in general is contradicted in the virtue of Melibaea as an individual. In both Common Conditions and Ralph Roister Doister the playwright adopts one of the

³⁶The Cobler's Prophecy ([London:] printed for the Malone Society by Horace Hart at the Oxford University Press, 1914), lines 852, 1056.

formal conventions of medieval satire as a part of the action - a lively debate in the former, developed at some length, between Sabia and Sedmond (in disguise), on whether men or women are the more constant, and in Ralph Roister Doister the letter with its brilliant two-way punctuation, one way praise, the other vilification. All of these represent more sophisticated attempts to use traditional satire for a dramatic purpose.

Satire on women in Tudor drama bears no relation to individual character: it is a generic comment which is not focussed on a particular woman portrayed realistically. The playwright is not concerned with women as people, nor with social criticism involving them. His vocabulary consists of types, of which the most prominent is the shrew, as in Tom Tyler and his Wife:

At board and at bed, I will crack the knave's head,
If he look but awry, or cast a sheep's eye:
So shall I be sure, to keep him in ure,
To serve like a knave, and live like a slave.³⁷

The play is one of the few which actually concentrates on domestic relations. In John Heywood's Johan Johan the satire on the intractability of Tyb is subordinated to the satire on priestly corruption.³⁸

Even in Gammer Gurton's Needle, where there is no abstract theme, the characterisation of Gammer and Dame Chat adheres rigidly, and explicitly, to types. Diccon says of Dame

³⁷ Tom Tyler and his Wife, in Six Anonymous Plays, (Second Series), Early English Dramatists, ed. by John S. Farmer (London: Early English Drama Society, 1906), p. 295.

³⁸ Marie Gothein's comments on Tyb in "Die Frau im englischen Drama vor Shakespeare," Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare-gesellschaft, Vol. XL (1904), 6, misrepresent the emphasis of the play by ignoring the anti-priesthood satire.

Chat that "the tongue it went on pattens," and in anticipating Gammer's rage he prophesies:

Dame Chat, on the other side, if she be far behind
I am right far deceived; she is given to it of kind.³⁹

The recognition that satire on women remains non-dramatic unless it is consciously integrated with character and plot, and relevant to the central ideas of a play, is only occasionally evident in Tudor drama. Even where it constitutes part of the Vice's attitude to life, it still tends to read as an interpolation from sources outside the drama. The problem for Jacobean dramatists is how to handle this unwieldy inheritance so as to give it a coherent creative purpose, which will revive some of its old energy in a new context.

Conventional satire on women does not have in Jacobean drama the haphazard ubiquity which characterised its appearance in Tudor plays. As Ester Sowernam asserted, satirical diatribes against women always point to qualities in the person who indulges in them. With the exception of Chapman, the dramatists seldom use verbal denigration of women in general as a means of satirising individuals: this is accomplished dramatically, through character and action. The abundance of stock satirical comment on women in these plays only indirectly suggests the dramatists' own attitudes to women. These attitudes are nearly always the reverse

³⁹Gammer Gurton's Needle, in Five Pre-Shakespearean Comedies, ed. by Frederick S. Boas (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 236, 235.

of those postulated in the satire itself.

But although the dramatists reject on moral and philosophical grounds the cynicism about women in medieval satire, they make capital out of its currency in popular literature. They can depend on their audience's familiarity with the prejudices which prompt Swetnam's pamphlet, and also with the egalitarian ideals and concern for social justice which motivate defenders of women. Jonson can be confident that the audience will recognize the terms of reference for Corvino's comment on Celia:

I hop'd that she were onward
To her damnation, if there be a hell
Greater then whore, and woman; a good catholique
May make the doubt.⁴⁰

Marston jibes at popular satirists when he makes Abigail in The Insatiate Countess imagine her husband turning satirist to vent his pique at her superior wit and virtue.

Abigail : They say mine has compiled an ungodly volume of satires against women, and calls his book The Snarl.
Thais : But he's in hope his book will save him.
Abigail : God defend that it should, or any that snarl in that fashion.⁴¹

Marston, in the same play, overlays protests against the injustice of satirists with his own irony; Gniaca, enamoured of Isabella but soon to be disillusioned, proclaims:

For though that women-haters now are common,
They all shall know earth's joy consists in woman.⁴²

The presence of a vulgarised querelle surviving in the mingled

⁴⁰ Jonson, Volpone, IV.v.128.

⁴¹ John Marston, The Insatiate Countess, in III, The Works of John Marston, III.iii.36.

⁴² Ibid., III.iv.48.

polemics and pastimes of second-rate writers creates a climate of alertness to satire on women; the dramatists write for an audience educated in a tradition of satire, however many permutations it has undergone since the days of its formal purity. No nuance will escape them in the handling of its legacy in the drama.

The advance from Tudor drama to Elizabethan and Jacobean is marked not only by a more sophisticated presentation, but by a shift in emphasis from ideas to people. Characters, if not always flesh-and-blood, are at least heterogeneous. Consequently satire on women ceases to be general and becomes selective: applying to particular types of women; spoken by identifiable groups of people.

The dramatists concentrate conventional satire on women in five different areas of experience: in the various descendants of the Vice - perhaps supplemented by the Italian malcontent;⁴³ in characters overtly debauched - panders, bawds, seducers, fallen women; in courtiers; in men who are either professed misogynists, or in whom relations with individual women has brought forth cynicism about the sex in general; and finally in women themselves. In all these cases the old archetypes of medieval satire have acquired a dramatic relevance.

The malcontent, detached from the play-world, commenting bitterly on its iniquities, is a less uneasy figure than the

⁴³ G. K. Hunter, "English Folly and Italian Vice: The Moral Landscape of John Marston," *Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies*, Vol. I: Jacobean Theatre (London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1960), 92.

Vice: his satire on women is part of a philosophy, not merely a frivolous extension of a stage license. Both Webster's malcontents, Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi, and Flamineo in The White Devil, satirise women in their role as critics of corruption. Bosola scoffs at Julia's lechery, and at the Old Lady who comes to deliver the Duchess's child: "The devil takes delight to hang at a women's girdle, like a false rusty watch, that she cannot discern how the time passes."⁴⁴ Webster uses Bosola's satirical distrust of women in general to high-light the Duchess's goodness and the hopelessness of her situation - her plea for married chastity in a society recognizing only the medieval view of women's frailty. Both Bosola and the Duchess reject the world around them, but the Duchess's rejection postulates belief in man's capacity for virtue, whereas Bosola's is a nihilistic retreat into isolation, his denial of goodness in human nature making him turn even from the woman whose virtue contradicts his negation, merely because she is a woman.

Foolish men,
That e'er will trust their honour in a bark
Made of so slight, weak bulrush as is woman,
Apt every minute to sink it!⁴⁵

That Flamineo is generically closer to the Vice than Bosola is evident both in his self-conscious manipulation of situation:

It may appear to some ridiculous
Thus to talk knave and madman; and sometimes
Come in with a dried sentence, stuff'd with sage.
But this allows my varying of shapes, -
Knives do grow great by being great men's apes,⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, II.ii.25.

⁴⁵ Ibid., II.v.33.

⁴⁶ John Webster, The White Devil, ed. by John Russell Brown, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1960), IV.ii.243.

his "varying of shapes" recalls Conditions, or Subtle Shift in Clyomon and Clamydes - and in the way in which his gadfly satire on women deflates romance. No poetic passions can survive his nudging, Pandarus-like commentary. He urges Brachiano, the romantic lover, to approach Vittoria, by assuring him of women's lustfulness:

What is't you doubt? her coyness? that's but the
superficies of lust most women have; yet why should ladies
blush to hear that nam'd, which they do not fear to handle?
O they are politic, they know our desire is increas'd by the
difficulty of enjoying; whereas satiety is a blunt, weary and
drowsy passion, - if the buttery-hatch at court stood con-
tinually open there would be nothing so passionate crowding,
nor hot suit after the beverage.⁴⁷

To Vittoria his argument is equally earthy:

Come, sister, darkness hides your blush, - women are
like curst dogs, civility keeps them tied all daytime, but
they are let loose at midnight, then they do most good or
most mischief.⁴⁸

At the height of a passionate scene between the two occasioned by
Brachiano's jealousy, Flamineo advises:

Fie, fie, my lord.
Women are caught as you take tortoises,
She must be turn'd on her back.⁴⁹

At Brachiano's death he allows no genuineness to Vittoria's grief:

Had women navigable rivers in their eyes
They would dispend them all; surely I wonder
Why we should wish more rivers to the city,
When they sell water so good cheap. I'll tell thee,
These are but moonish shades of griefs or fears,
There's nothing sooner dry than women's tears.⁵⁰

She fails to trick him because he expects deceit from women:

⁴⁷ Ibid., I. ii. 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., I. ii. 298.

⁴⁹ Ibid., IV. ii. 150.

⁵⁰ Ibid., V. iii. 181.

Trust a woman? - never, never; Bracciano be my precedent: we lay our souls to pawn to the devil for a little pleasure, and a woman makes the bill of sale.⁵¹

Flammineo's satire on women grows out of the action of the play. But his cynicism about them allies him with the Vice, rather than the true malcontent; it is an inseparable part of his nature, rather than a reaction set in motion by the corruption of society. Webster disguises Flammineo's ancestry by stressing the influence of the court on his development:

I visited the court, whence I return'd,
More courteous, more lecherous by far.

Flammineo claims that his disillusion with women represents a mature judgment on the idolatry of his youth:

I myself have loved a lady and pursued her with a great deal of under-age protestation, whom some three or four gallants that have enjoyed would with all their hearts have been glad to have been rid of: 'tis just like a summer bird-cage in a garden, - the birds that are without, despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and are in a consumption for fear they shall never get out.⁵²

But this is Webster's way of dressing the Vice in motive and human verisimilitude.

Flammineo's satire on women, unlike that of the Vice in Tudor drama, is central to the morality of the play: like Enobarbus's on Cleopatra, it exposes the issues involved in adulterous passion. His belittling of the love between Brachiano and Vittoria contradicts the charge that Webster had "no profound hold on any system of moral values."⁵³ But it is misleading to see this as the deliberate policy of a fully motivated character.

⁵¹Ibid., V.vi.160.

⁵²Ibid., I.ii.325, 40.

⁵³Ian Jack, "The Case of John Webster," Scrutiny, XVI, No. 1 (1949), 41-42.

One critic writes:

It has been objected to both Webster and Flamineo that the reflections [on the lasciviousness of women, the imbecility of husbands, the vanity of love] are not new. This is true, but not therefore a fault. For Brachiano's incipient passion is a difficult problem: in so far as it inclines to vice and lust Flamineo welcomes it, as it promises a hold upon Brachiano; love and virtue on the other hand must loosen that hold perhaps even remove it if conscience, as it has begun, continues stirring. So he has to encourage the passion, and at the same time degrade it.⁵⁴

Flamineo is a more literary creation than such an analysis suggests. His predilection for degrading passion and satirising women is hereditary. Webster places a semi-allegorical figure in a society where his theatrical villainy and cynicism can masquerade as human motive. His medieval satire on women, projected in a society where women merit his censures, passes for spontaneous commentary on the world around him.

Iago's evolution from the Vice, in his destructive hatred of romantic love, has been sufficiently documented.⁵⁵ It is worth noticing how closely his satire on women echoes medieval scurrility:

Come on, come on, you are pictures out o' doors;
Bells in your parlours; wild-cats in your kitchens;
Saints in your injuries; devils being offended;
Players in your housewifery; and housewives in your beds.

For him Emilia (and indeed all wives by their nature) is the archetypal shrewish wife:

Sir, would she give you so much of her lips
As of her tongue she has bestow'd on me,
You'd have enough.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ James Smith, "The Tragedy of Blood," Scrutiny, VIII, No. 3 (1939), 273.

⁵⁵ Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains.

⁵⁶ Othello, II.i.109, 100.

It is an easy matter for him to convince himself, at least so that he experiences no remorse, that Desdemona is lustful and inconstant because she is a woman; there is no place for a chaste and virtuous woman in his philosophy, where love "is merely a lust of the blood, and a permission of the will."⁵⁷ Shakespeare shows a man whose belief in the view of women propounded in medieval satire allows him to justify the destruction of an individual. Iago only admits Desdemona's virtue when he is urging Cassio to enlist her advocacy - when praise of her can only cement his plan to harm her: "She is so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, that she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested."⁵⁸

In spite of his similar relation to the Vice, however, Iago is a human being in a way that Flamineo is not. Where Webster merely finds an appropriate secular setting and outlet for the Vice's satire about women, Shakespeare draws a character who applies the judgments of a literary mode to real people in a real world. For Iago, cynicism about women is both motive and commentary and vindication, not the excrescence of "motiveless malignity." Iago is morally involved in the tragedy and his satire exists in a moral universe, whereas the Vice's exists in the theatre and in literature.

The same identification of satire and action is evident in Iachimo, in Cymbeline, although his cynicism is less closely related to the Vice's and probably owes at least some of its origin to an English conviction about the superior debauchery of Italians. Whatever its heredity, his satire is an integrated part of the play: "If you buy ladies' flesh at a million a dram, you cannot preserve it from tainting."⁵⁹ It initiates action and influences individual characters and destiny - Iachimo's own, Posthumus's and Imogen's.

⁵⁷ Ibid., I.iii.335.

⁵⁸ Ibid., II.iii.310.

⁵⁹ Cymbeline, I.v.139.

In the un-tragic dimension of the play Shakespeare is also able to suggest the folly of a sensible man with a blameless wife taking such fustian seriously. Posthumus' thinking about women is close enough to medieval idolisation and satire for his faith in Imogen to be challenged by a stock cynical judgment on women. The play shows his progression to a sense of the irrelevance of such assertions to human conduct.

The Vice has comic as well as tragic off-shoots; the jester and the sharper acknowledge his paternity in a shared satire (albeit light-hearted) about women, as well as in the Fool's detachment from the play, and the knave's trickery. Quick-silver in Eastward Ho satirises women's lust (with reference to Gertrude): "These women, sir, are like Essex calves, you must wriggle 'hem on by the tail still, or they will never drive orderly."⁶⁰ Launce in The Two Gentlemen of Verona plays with the medieval debate on whether women had souls:

This shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father:
no, no, this left shoe is my mother: nay that cannot be so
neither: yet, it is so, it is so, it hath the worser sole. This
shoe, with the hole in it, is my mother, and this my father.⁶¹

He adopts the stance of the mock-defender of women, parrying Speed's assertion that his love is slow in words with:

O villain, that set this down among her vices!
To be slow in words is a woman's only virtue,

and his accusation of pride with: "Out with that too; it was Eve's legacy, and cannot be ta'en from her."⁶² The old jests about

⁶⁰ Chapman, Jonson and Marston, Eastward Ho, p. 460.

⁶¹ Shakespeare, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, ed. by R. Warwick Bond, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co., 1906), II.iii.16.

⁶² Ibid., III.i.330, 335.

women are used with new versatility. They suggest the character of the jester - as an individual instead of a dramatic convention - and supplement both the action and the theme of the play.

For Webster the traditions of the medieval Vice and the Italian malcontent fuse in Flamineo and Bosola. In other plays the Vice gives way to the malcontent, who nevertheless retains a Vice-like cynicism about women as an extension of his own political and social disillusion. Neither Malevole in Marston's The Malcontent, nor Hamlet, relate to the Vice; but their satire on women is generically related to his satire.

Malevole's mission is against the corruption of the court as a whole although this includes exposing Aurelia's debauchery. When he is about to surrender his role of professional critic and be reunited with a wife of proved virtue, he poses as satirist against women:

Maquerelle, I tell thee, I have found an honest woman: faith, I perceive, when all is done, there is of women, as of all other things, some good, most bad; some saints, some sinners: for as nowadays no courtier but has his mistress, no captain but has his cockatrice, no cuckold but has his horns, and no fool but has his feather; even so, no woman but has her weakness and feather too, no sex but has his - I can hunt the letter no farther. - (Aside) O God, how loathsome this toying is to me! that a duke should be forced to fool it! ⁶³

Having rejected society in order to reform it, he finally repudiates the artifices of the rejector. He realises that satire on women applies to the debauched women of a corrupt society, but fires back on the folly of the satirist when directed against women in general. As so often with Marston, the individual woman contradicts medieval denigration of the whole sex.

By contrast, Hamlet's condemnation of all women -

⁶³ Marston, The Malcontent, in I, Works, V.ii.131.

"frailty thy name is woman!"⁶⁴ - stems from the corruption of an individual. Unlike the other malcontents his disillusion with society and with politics is consequent on his sense of his mother's betrayal; her action inaugurates his cynicism about women in general. For him medieval satire has moved from literature to life:

The power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd, than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof.

Ophelia is no longer the individual that he loved, but the representative of a sex who prove by their actions that they deserve the satire cast on them by poets and philosophers:

If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry - be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny; get thee to a nunnery, go, farewell. . . . Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them: to a nunnery, go, and quickly too, farewell.⁶⁵

Hamlet fails to dissociate Ophelia from his mother's sin; he deliberately divorces himself from her love, embracing the assessment of women's capacity for virtue propounded by medieval cynics. His satire on women is not the garnish of disillusion, nor simply an idiosyncratic reaction to grief.⁶⁶ It is central to the action of the play - Ophelia is rejected not as an

⁶⁴Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. by John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), I.ii.146.

⁶⁵Ibid., III.i.111, 137.

⁶⁶Cf. Hippolito's extravagant rejection of all women resulting from his grief at Infelice's supposed death in The Honest Whore. He vows eternal faithfulness, then, in answer to his Servant's question: "What to supper?" replies: "That which (now) thou canst not get me, the constancy of a woman." Dekker and Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, in II, Works, IV.i.26.

individual, but as woman.

Hamlet : Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?
Ophelia : 'Tis brief, my lord.
Hamlet : As woman's love.⁶⁷

Shakespeare explores the tragedy inherent in substituting generalised literary dicta for judgment of individual character.

All these descendants of the Vice provide evidence of the disciplined dramatic function which the dramatists have evolved for archetypal satire on women.

The second group of characters who satirise women in conventional terms is composed of professional debauchees and others who share their morals. A cynical view of women justifies their own way of life. They are the "masculine serpents" - and feminine too for that matter - whose detraction of women reflects their own viciousness. The dramatists turn the sting of medieval satire back on the satirist: a change of direction which allies them with the female opponents of Swetnam.

As early as Calisto and Melibaea the bawd (Celestina), who tries to corrupt Melibaea, emerges as a satirist of women. Her descendants in Jacobean drama are legion. Birdlime in Westward Ho encourages Wafer's lust: "I loue to be once a weeke a horsebacke, for methinks nothing sets a man out, better than Horse," with: "'Tis certen, nothing sets a woman out better than a man."⁶⁸ When Mrs. Iustiniano scorns her, Birdlime takes refuge in satire: "Bawde and diuel, and stale damnation! Wil

⁶⁷ Hamlet, III.ii.150.

⁶⁸ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, in II, Works, IV.i.94.

womens tounges (like Bakers legs) neuer go straight."⁶⁹

Maquerelle in The Malcontent claims that "women are flax, and will fire in a moment," and instructs Malevole in the art of seduction:

Court any woman in the right sign, you shall not miss. But you must take her in the right vein then; as, when the sign is in Pisces, a fishmonger's wife is very sociable; in Cancer, a precision's wife is very flexible; in Capricorn, a merchant's wife hardly holds out; in Libra, a lawyer's wife is very tractable, especially if her husband be at the term; only in Scorpio 'tis very dangerous meddling.⁷⁰

Cynicism about women's virtue is the trick of the bawd's trade - it encourages her clients, and dulls her own conscience.

The courtesan, (the bawd in her youth), also justifies her way of life by asserting that it is natural to women to be lustful and imperfect, and to act as she does. Doll in Northward Ho assures Chartley that "siluer is the Kings stampe, man Gods stampe, and a woman is mans stampe, wee are not currant till we passe from one man to another."⁷¹ The Courtesan in A Mad World, my Masters elaborates the theme:

Pooh, all the world knows women are soon down: we can be sick when we have a mind to't, catch an ague with the wind of our fans, surfeit upon the rump of a lark, and bestow ten pound in physic upon't: we're likest ourselves when we're down; 'tis the easiest art and cunning for our sect to counterfeit sick, that are always full of fits when we are well; for since we were made for a weak, imperfect creature, we can fit that best that we are made for.⁷²

Imperia, the courtesan in Blurt, Master Constable, excuses her

⁶⁹Ibid., II.ii.156.

⁷⁰Marston, The Malcontent, V.ii.147, 65.

⁷¹Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, in II, Works, I.ii.81.

⁷²Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, in III, Works, II. vi. 30.

individual frailty on the grounds that it is generic to her sex.

In the case of all these characters, recourse to conventional satire on women is a substitute for moral responsibility in the individual; the dramatists, in attributing satire to degenerate characters, themselves repudiate its moral validity. Chapman is the only exception. In Bussy D'Ambois the Friar's cynicism about women seems to proclaim Chapman's own attitude:

In anything a woman does alone,
If she dissemble, she thinks 'tis not done;
If not dissemble, nor a little chide,
Give her her wish, she is not satisfied;
To have a man think that she never seeks,
Does her more good than to have all she likes:
This frailty sticks in them beyond their sex,
Which to reform, reason is too perplex:
Urge reason to them, it will do no good;
Humour (that is the chariot of our food
In everybody) must in them be fed
To carry their affections by it bred.⁷³

Although in his role as Tamyra's pander the Friar might legitimately satirise women, conventional satire is not exclusively his prerogative. Almost all the characters in the play speak of women in these terms. Chapman's dramatic technique, like that of the Tudor dramatist, consists in using his characters as mouthpieces for his own theories; and for him medieval satire on women carries judgments valid in a world of human motive and action. "We find men again choosing between carnality and spirituality, women again oscillating between the pit and the pedestal."⁷⁴ His manipulation of medieval satire is non-dramatic; but he accepts the validity of its criteria in his portrayal of female character. Thus he stands between Tudor drama - lifting chunks of satire into plays on abstract themes - and his contemporaries, who find in it another

⁷³ Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, pp. 152-153.

⁷⁴ Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, p. 242.

dimension for analysis of character. In his hands stock satire on women ceases to be a literary convention without developing into a dramatic instrument.

Fallen women and seducers, like bawds and panders, have an ulterior motive in taking the premises of medieval satire on women seriously. If all women are frail of their nature, an individual lapse rates as a peccadillo. Kate Greenshield in Northward Ho advises husbands:

If a woman proue false the first yeare, turne her vpon her fathers neck, if the second, turne her home to her father but allow her a portion, but if she hould pure mettaile two yeare and flie to seuerall peeces, in the third, repaire the ruines of her honesty at your charges, for the best peece of ordinance, may bee crackt in the casting, and for women to have cracks and flaues, alas they are borne to them.⁷⁵

Isabella in The Insatiate Countess attributes her own lustfulness - albeit disingenuously - to natural female compulsion: "Desire in woman cannot be withstood."⁷⁶ She explains that "when we are once o' the falling hand, / A man may easily come over us." "Weaking variety" is "woman's hell."⁷⁷ Zanthia, the lascivious attendant in The Wonder of Women, speaks of "we imperfect mixtures"; she and her mistress are:

Things call'd women, only made for show
And pleasure, created to bear children
And play at shuttlecock.⁷⁸

Her cynicism combines a half-conviction of its truth with recognition of its expediency. Cressida, accepting Diomedes, laments:

⁷⁵ Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, II.ii.135.

⁷⁶ Marston, The Insatiate Countess, IV.ii.18.

⁷⁷ Ibid., I.i.89, III.iv.96.

⁷⁸ Marston, The Wonder of Women, or, The Tragedy of Sophonisba, in II, Works, I.ii.20.

Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find,
The error of our eye directs our mind.⁷⁹

Guilt makes a woman unwilling to admit her own capacity for virtue because this would add gravity to her fall; to enlist all her sex as comrades in error is comforting. Evadne resolves:

Since I can do no good, because a woman,
Reach constantly at something that is near it.⁸⁰

In all these women allegiance to the medieval verdict on women's frailty stems partly from a sense of its convenience, partly from a perception blunted to the goodness apparent in other women.

In Marston's The Wonder of Women Sophonisba, accosted by Syphax, apes the fallen woman's reliance on generic frailty; Syphax's morals show him to be susceptible to denigration of women: Sophonisba's tactic exploits the male brag that female modesty is the cloak of lust:

I needs must love thee
For (O, my sex, forgive!) I must confess
We not affect protesting feebleness,
Entreats, faint blushings, timorous modesty;
We think our lover is but little man,
Who is so full of woman.⁸¹

Sophonisba takes a double advantage of medieval stereotypes, by adopting them to suggest that she is the type of woman who would do so naturally.

Seducers, both successful and unsuccessful, accept the

⁷⁹ Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, ed. by Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), V.ii.109.

⁸⁰ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, in Five Stuart Tragedies, ed. by A. K. McIlwraith (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), IV.ii.258.

⁸¹ Marston, The Wonder of Women, or, The Tragedy of Sophonisba, III.i.28.

medieval satirists' estimate of women's virtue. Women easily won face derision even from their lovers. Horsus, paramour of Roxena in Middleton's The Mayor of Queenborough claims that

'Tis her cunning,
The love of her own lust, which makes a woman
Gallop down hill as fearless as a drunkard.⁸²

Witgood in A Trick to Catch the Old One urges his mistress, a Courtesan, to "stay (a thing few women can do, I know that, and therefore they had need wear stays), be not contrary."⁸³

Thwarted seducers, or suitors, belittle the women who spurn them, as in the masque put on by the five rejected lovers in Middleton's No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's: "These women / Were made to vex and trouble us in all shapes."⁸⁴ Belief in female worthlessness and caprice salves their pride. In Cymbeline Cloten feigns indifference to Imogen: "Why should his [Posthumus.] mistress who was made by him that made the tailor, not be fit too? The rather (saving reverence of the word) for 'tis said a woman's fitness comes by fits."⁸⁵ More magnificent is Don Armado's belittling of women in his letter accusing Custard and Jacquenetta. He calls her "a child of our grandmother Eve, a female; or, for thy more sweet understanding, a woman . . . For Jacquenetta - so is the weaker vessel called . . ."⁸⁶ Satire consoles men for lack of success. Quarlous contemplates

⁸² Thomas Middleton, The Mayor of Queenborough, in II, The Works of Thomas Middleton, II.iii.166.

⁸³ Middleton, A Trick to Catch the Old One, in II, Works, I.i.49.

⁸⁴ Middleton, No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, in IV, Works, III.i.248.

⁸⁵ Cymbeline, IV.i.3.

⁸⁶ Shakespeare, Love's Labour's Lost, ed. by Richard David, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1951).

Grace in Bartholomew Fair: "My hope is in her temper, yet; and it must needs be next to despair, that is grounded on any part of a woman's discretion."⁸⁷ In Middleton's The Widow Ricardo and Francisco rehearse a courtship; Ricardo plays the easy lady, but Francisco brushes him aside and enacts a scornful one repulsing Ricardo's suit. Ricardo, provoked, forgets that he is acting, and taunts the 'lady':

What a pestilent quean's this! I shall have much ado with her, I see that. - Tell me, as you're a woman, lady, what serve kisses for but to stop all your mouths?⁸⁸

As Donne pointed out, idolatrous and satirical attitudes to women complement each other. In A Mad World, my Masters, Penitent Brothel, the romantic lover of another man's wife, writes remorse with denigration:

To doat on weakness, slime, corruption, woman!
What is she, took asunder from her clothes?
Being ready, she consists of an hundred pieces,
Much like your German clock, and near ally'd;
Both are so nice, they cannot go for pride:
Besides a greater fault but too well known,
They'll strike to ten, when they should stop at one.⁸⁹

Massina in The Insatiate Countess deifies Isabella when about to commit adultery with her:

So fell the Trojan wanderer on the Greek,
And bore away his ravish'd prize to Troy.
For such a beauty, brighter than his Danae,
Jove should (methinks) now come himself again.
Lovely Isabella, I confess me mortal -
Not worthy to serve thee in thought I swear;
Yet shall not this same overflow of favour
Diminish my vow'd duty to your beauty.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Jonson, Bartholomew Fair, IV.vi.38.

⁸⁸Middleton, Jonson and Fletcher, The Widow, in V, Works, I.ii.134.

⁸⁹Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, IV.i.18.

⁹⁰Marston, The Insatiate Countess, II.iii.67.

When she defects to her next lover, the medieval satirist emerges:

Man were on earth an angel but for woman.
That sevenfold branch of hell from them doth grow;
Pride, lust, and murder, they raise from below,
With all their fellow-sins. Women are made
Of blood, without souls; when their beauties fade,
And their lust's past, avarice or bawdry
Makes them still loved: then they buy venery,
Bribing damnation.⁹¹

Marston is as cynical about his heroine's seducers as about the heroine herself. In The Malcontent Mendoza, Aurelia's paramour, adulates women:

Sweet women! most sweet ladies! nay, angels! by heaven, he is more accursed than a devil that hates you, or is hated by you; and happier than a god that loves you, or is beloved by you. . . . O paradise! how majestic is your austerer presence! how imperiously chaste is your more modest face! . . . these amorous smiles, those soul-warming sparkling glances, ardent as those flames that singed the world by heedless Phaeton! in body how delicate, in soul how witty, in discourse how pregnant, in life how wary, in favours how judicious, in day how sociable, and in night how - O pleasure unutterable! . . . in despite of Phoebus, I'll write a sonnet instantly in praise of her.⁹²

Its kinship with stock satire, latent but discernible, surfaces when Aurelia repulses him:

Women! nay, Furies; nay, worse; for they torment only the bad, but women good and bad. Damnation of mankind! Breath, hast thou praised them for this? . . . O, that I could rail against these monsters in nature, models of hell, curse of the earth, women! . . . rash in asking, desperate in working, impatient in suffering, extreme in desiring, slaves unto appetite, mistresses in dissembling, only constant in unconstancy, only perfect in counterfeiting: . . . their blood is their only god.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid., III.iv.175.

⁹² Marston, The Malcontent, I.i.20.

⁹³ Ibid., I.ii.85.

Marston despises both excesses.

Richard III's Vice-like cynicism about women:

Bear her my true love 's kiss; and so farewell.
Relenting fool, and shallow-changing woman, ⁹⁴

enables him to counterfeit the idolatry of the seducer. His spurious romanticism is congruous with his medieval contempt. He salutes Anne as "divine perfection of a woman," blames "your heavenly face" for his crimes, and casts himself in the role of courtly lover seeking trials in order to gain his lady's favour:

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty that did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom. ⁹⁵

He revels in his own irony, that a man "not shap'd for sportive tricks, / Nor made to court an amorous looking glass," "rudely stamp'd," wanting "love's majesty," unable to "prove a lover / To entertain these fair well-spoken days," ⁹⁶ should be able to demonstrate the worthlessness of these creatures prized by, and themselves prizing, other men:

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long. ⁹⁷

For him conventional satire is the truth which makes the falsehood of romance easy.

Characters of debauched morals find in conventional satire

⁹⁴ Shakespeare, The Tragedy of King Richard the Third, ed. by A. Hamilton Thompson, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1932), IV.iv.433.

⁹⁵ Ibid., I.ii.75, 182, 121.

⁹⁶ Ibid., I.i.14, 28.

⁹⁷ Ibid., I.ii.228.

a view of women which fits their way of life. If women are frail by nature, not by choice, their own fall becomes a stoic acceptance of the facts of existence, and the men who help them to it need not feel remorse. Another man would have done, and will do, the same.

In Jacobean drama conventional satire on women is the hall-mark of the courtier: an irony of history, since in the Middle Ages it marked a bourgeois response to courtly love. One explanation of the change may lie in the infiltration of Puritan attitudes to women and marriage into middle-class life; another in the influence of Humanist rejection of the morals of courtly love. The central factor seems to be the dramatists' identification of upper-class insolvency with the loose morals of the Court. With the blurring of class distinctions through marriage, both aspects of upper-class life threaten middle-class stability. The dramatists, assuming in their audience Puritan attitudes to women, assign conventional satire to courtiers and gallants as a symbol of the gulf between their debauched values and middle-class morality. The venom of the courtiers' satire ricochets from the usually virtuous citizen's wife back to its originator.

Courtiers and gallants boast about women's lustfulness. Tailby, the whore-gallant in Your Five Gallants declares:

These women are such creatures, such importunate sweet souls, they'll scarce give a man leave to be ready; that's their only fault, i'faith: if they be once set upon a thing, why, there's no removing of 'em, till their pretty wills be fulfilled. O, pity thy poor oppressed client here, sweet Cupid, that has scarce six hours' vacation in a month, his causes hang in so many courts! 98

⁹⁸Middleton, Your Five Gallants, in III, The Works of Thomas Middleton, III.i.4.

Although Tailby himself has seduced women, the boast is the same in men who have not. Lipsalve in The Family of Love, repulsed by Mrs. Purge, reflects that "outward apparance is no authentic instance of the inward desires: women have sharp falcon's eyes, and can soar aloft; but keep them, like falcons, from flesh, and they soon stoop to a gaudy lure."⁹⁹ Herod in Marston's The Fawn sighs:

O the falling sickness on them all! why did reasonable nature give so strange, so rebellious, so tyrannous, so insatiate parts of appetite to so weak a governess - a woman?¹⁰⁰

Doubt of women's assailability is rare. Gudgeon in The Family of Love, while loud-mouthed about women's lust, admits that "opportunity favours me not, nor indeed is she so tractable as I expected."¹⁰¹ But in Northward Ho, Greenshield, impatient of Mrs. Maybery's "puritanicall coynesse" silences Fetherstone's demur: "Suppose it she should be chast?" with: "O hang her: this art of seeming honest makes many of our young sonnes and heires in the Citty looke so like our prentises."¹⁰² Gallants are shameless until shamed.

Gallants satirise women while using them for financial gain. The Knight in The Phoenix lives on the money supplied him by the Jeweller's wife while proclaiming: "How small are women's waists to their expenses!"¹⁰³ Laxton in The Roaring Girl comments on his affair with Mrs. Gallipot:

⁹⁹ Middleton, The Family of Love, in III, Works, I.ii.148.

¹⁰⁰ Marston, The Fawn, in II, Works, IV.i.119.

¹⁰¹ Middleton, The Family of Love, II.iv.157.

¹⁰² Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, I.i.9.

¹⁰³ Middleton, The Phoenix, in I, Works, I.vi.135.

By this light, I hate her, but for means to keep me in fashion with gallants; for what I take from her, I spend upon other wenches; bear her in hand still: she has wit enough to rob her husband, and I ways enough to consume the money.¹⁰⁴

He takes the money, while condemning women in medieval terms:

That wile,
By which the serpent did the first woman beguile,
Did ever since all women's bosoms fill;
You're apple-eaters all, deceivers still.¹⁰⁵

Not all women are so gullible; Mrs. Honysuckle in Westward Ho warns against the gallant, Monopoly, who "loues Citty dames only for their victuals."¹⁰⁶ The dramatists express city hostility to sponging gentry by attributing to them discredited attitudes to women.

The hypocrisy of the gallant's satire on women is exposed in these plays. He can ruin reputation. Epicoene, in her role as woman, warns the collegiates against courtiers:

They, what they tell one of us, have told a thousand and are the only thieves of our fame, that think to take us with that perfume or with that lace, and laugh at us unconscionably when they have done.¹⁰⁷

Sir John Daw and Sir Amorous La Foole brag of the times they have slept with Epicoene, first from bravado alone, secondly to give Morose grounds for divorce, banishing hesitation with the reflection that "She is but a woman, and in disgrace."¹⁰⁸ At the end of the play Truewit confronts them with the 'woman' they have deflowered:

¹⁰⁴Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, in IV, Works, II.i. 89.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., III.iii. 259.

¹⁰⁶Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, I.ii. 88.

¹⁰⁷Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, IV.v. 28.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., V.iv. 91.

Nay, Sir Daw and Sir La Foole, you see the gentlewoman that has done you favors! We are all thankful to you, and should the womankind here, specially for lying on her, though not with her! You meant so, I am sure? . . . This Amazon, the champion of the sex, should beat you now thriftily for the common slanders which ladies receive from such cuckoos as you are. You are they that, when no merit or fortune can make you hope to enjoy their bodies, will yet lie with their reputations and make their fame suffer. Away, you common moths of these and all ladies' honors.¹⁰⁹

Moll Cutpurse berates Laxton in language worthy of Constantia Munda:

Thou'rt one of those
That thinks each woman thy fond flexible whore;
If she but cast a liberal eye upon thee,
Turn back her head, she's thine; or amongst company
By chance drink first to thee, then she's quite gone,
There is no means to help her: nay, for a meed,
Wilt swear unto thy credulous fellow-lechers,
That thou art more in favour with a lady
At first sight than her monkey all her lifetime.
How many of our sex by such as thou,
Have their good thoughts paid with a blasted name
That never deserv'd loosely, or did trip
In path of whoredom beyond cup and lip!
But for the stain of conscience and of soul,
Better had women fall into the hands
Of an act silent than a bragging nothing.¹¹⁰

Gallants' cynicism about women is easily aped, and this is often a means of exposing them. Bellamont in Northward Ho draws the gallants out in their boasts about Mrs. Maybery with satirical interventions - "your cittyzens wiues are like Partriges, the hens are better then the cocks."¹¹¹ Truewit equips himself with court attitudes to women to fool Sir John Daw and Sir Amorous. He informs Dauphine:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., V.iv.207.

¹¹⁰ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, III.i.72.

¹¹¹ Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, II.ii.67.

A man should not doubt to overcome any woman. Think he can vanquish 'em and he shall; for though they deny, their desire is to be tempted. Penelope herself cannot hold out long. Ostend, you saw, was taken at last. You must persevere and hold to your purpose. They would solicit us, but that they are afraid. Howsoever, they wish in their hearts we should solicit them. Praise 'em, flatter 'em, you shall never want eloquence or trust; even the chastest delight to feel themselves that way rubb'd. With praises you must mix kisses too. If they take them, they'll take more. Though they strive, they would be overcome.

Dauphine inquires in response: "On what courtly lap hast thou late slept to come forth so sudden and absolute a courtling?"¹¹² In Middleton's The Phoenix and Marston's The Fawn the humours of gallants are aped by an observer in disguise - Fitsgrave; and Hercules.

With an explanatory aside - "But my young gallants, to speak like myself, I must hug your humour",¹¹³ "myself" meaning his fawning character - Hercules joins Herod and Nymphodoro in denigrating women. Nymphodoro asserts that "women are but men turn'd the wrong side outward"; he replies:

O, sir, Nature is a wise workman. She knows right well that if women should woo us to the act of love, we should all be utterly shamed. How often should they take us unprovided, when they are always ready!¹¹⁴

Zoya, convinced of his wife's faithlessness after years of maltreatment from him, exclaims:

O Heaven! that God made for a man no other means of procreation and maintaining the world peopled but by women! O! that we could increase like roses, by being slipp'd one from another - or like flies, procreate with blowing, or any other way than by a woman.

¹¹² Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, IV.i.67, 121.

¹¹³ Marston, The Fawn, II.i.86.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., IV.i.136.

Hercules extends his fantasy, with irony:

Or, that since Heaven hath given us no other means to allay our furious appetite, no other way of increasing our progeny, . . . why did not Heaven make us a nobler creature than women, to show unto? - some admirable deity, of an uncorruptible beauty, that might be worth our knees, the expense of our heat, and the crinkling of our hams.¹¹⁵

The conclusion of the play is a feminist one - the gallants are routed.

Middleton's demonstration in No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's of a character aping a gallant's satire on women is revealing. Weatherwise determines:

I'll give it out abroad that I have lain with the widow myself, as 'tis the fashion of many a gallant to disgrace his new mistress when he cannot have his will of her, and lie with her name in every tavern, though he ne'er come within a yard of her person; so I, being a gentleman, may say as much in that kind as a gallant; I am as free by my father's copy.¹¹⁶

Weatherwise hopes to identify himself with the gentry as a social class by adopting their cynicism about women, although recognizing its origin in thwarted lechery. Attitudes to women express class consciousness.

The dramatists' assigning of medieval attitudes to women to a class they despised shows how thoroughly they themselves - and their audience - had assimilated Puritan liberal attitudes to women.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., IV.i.401, 412.

¹¹⁶ Middleton, No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, III.i.59.

The fourth group of characters indulging in medieval satire on women consists of misguided men, viewed both comically and tragically.

Stock satire is the badge of misogyny, as in Beaumont and Fletcher's The Woman-Hater, or Jonson's Epicoene.

Morose's fear of female loquacity:

Can you naturally, lady, as I enjoin these by doctrine and industry, refer yourself to the search of my judgment and (not taking pleasure in your tongue, which is a woman's chiefest pleasure) think it plausible to answer me by silent gestures?¹¹⁷

occasions his humiliation by his wife's rampancy, by his own perjury - he pleads impotence - and by his discovery that he has married a boy.

The dramatists also direct their irony against men who accuse women of failings they themselves manifest. Proteus' conventional reproach of women's waywardness:

O, 'tis the curse in love, and still approved,
When women cannot love where they're beloved!

encounters Silvia's retort: "When Proteus cannot love where he's beloved."¹¹⁸ In Love's Labour's Lost the decree "that no woman shall come within a mile of my court," with its penalty "on pain of losing her tongue,"¹¹⁹ is devised by the most talkative young men in Shakespeare.

Satire on women in general may be engendered by misconceptions about individual women. Iustiniano in Westward Ho nourishes his fanatical jealousy of his chaste wife with the dicta

¹¹⁷ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, II.v.41.

¹¹⁸ The Two Gentlemen of Verona, V.iv.43.

¹¹⁹ Love's Labour's Lost, I.i.119, 122.

of medieval cynics:

All wiues loue clipping, there's no fault in mine.
But if the world lay speechles, euen the dead
Would rise and thus cry out from yawning graues
Women make men, or Fooles, or Beasts, or Slaues.¹²⁰

In Middleton's A Fair Quarrel Captain Ager's propensity to accept the judgment of the medieval satirist makes him credulous about his mother's alleged whoredom:

O who'd erect th'assurance of his joys
Upon a woman's goodness! whose best virtue
Is to commit unseen, and highest secrecy
To hide but her own sin; there's their perfection.¹²¹

These are misunderstandings easy to rectify, evincing folly rather than a warped sensibility.

This form of vitriolic reaction may, however, spring from a corroded moral sense, as in Leontes' perverted repudiation of women in The Winter's Tale:

Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves. Physic for't there's none;
It is a bawdy planet, that will strike
Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis powerful, think it,
From east, west, north, and south; be it concluded,
No barricado for a belly. Know 't,
It will let in and out the enemy,
With bag and baggage.¹²²

Othello's rejection of Desdemona in conventional satire worthy of Iago demonstrates how totally he has been corrupted by Iago's way of looking at the world; his wondering acceptance of, and joy in, Desdemona undergoes transformation: through Iago's eyes he sees

¹²⁰ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, II.i.233.

¹²¹ Middleton and Rowley, A Fair Quarrel, in IV, Works, IV.iii.8.

¹²² The Winter's Tale, I.ii.198.

her as the stock monstrous woman of medieval satire:

O devil, devil!
If that the earth could teem with women's tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.¹²³

Compared with these two, Posthumus' outburst against women when convinced of Imogen's frailty, seems a self-conscious literary posture. He demands, like Zoya in Marston's The Fawn:

Is there no way for man to be, but women
Must be half-workers?

Like medieval satirists and moralists Posthumus wants to extirpate the Eve in him:

Could I find out
The woman's part in me - for there's no motion
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,
The woman's: flattering, hers; deceiving, hers:
Lust, and rank thoughts, hers, hers: revenges, hers:
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
Nice longing, slanders, mutability;
All faults that name, nay, that hell knows, why, hers
In part, or all: but rather all. For even to vice
They are not constant, but are changing still;
One vice, but of a minute old, for one
Not half so old as that.

His revenge will be Gosynhyll's or Swetnam's:

I'll write against them,
Detest them, curse them: yet 'tis greater skill
In a true hate, to pray they have their will
The very devils cannot plague them better.¹²⁴

Shakespeare deliberately draws in Posthumus a character of untragic stature, incapable of the moral upheaval which impels Othello's satire; too sane for Leontes' obsessive commitment to the premises of satire. Shakespeare satirises in him the leap

¹²³ Othello, IV.i.239.

¹²⁴ Cymbeline, II.iv.153, 171, 183.

into literature to explain life; the recourse to the judgments of poets and pamphleteers abhorred by Bullinger.¹²⁵ Posthumus's development is through excesses - both of condemnation, and of self-laceration - which blind him to things as they are. In the final act common sense, not pity and terror, purifies him; Imogen asks: "Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?"¹²⁶ The satirist is silenced.

Finally, women themselves dabble in conventional satire; sometimes from a mistaken conviction of its justice; more often for reasons of expediency; most wickedly when, disguised as men, they ape the male satirist.

In Measure for Measure Isabella's enthusiasm for Angelo's judgment: "Nay, women are frail too," traps her:

Ay, as the glasses where they view themselves,
Which are as easy broke as they make forms.
Women? - Help, heaven! Men their creation mar
In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail:
For we are soft as our complexions are,
And credulous to false prints.

Angelo takes his cue:

¹²⁵ E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's Last Plays (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), pp. 28-29, thinks that this speech suggests "that Shakespeare was deliberately satirising the satirists"; but Shakespeare never introduces peripheral topical satire into his plays. He satirises the attitude of mind which dictates such a course to Posthumus. Tillyard also criticises Shakespeare for giving Posthumus a speech "quite remote from tragic feeling," and asserts that it is "the worst possible preparation for Posthumus's solemn penitence when he reappears in Act V," without considering that this deficiency might be central to Shakespeare's conception of Posthumus.

¹²⁶ Cymbeline, V.v.261.

Be that you are,
That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none.¹²⁷

Her own nature, as well as Angelo's, contradicts her facile concurrence in a medieval estimate of women's inferior moral nature. She comes to realise that frailty is not the prerogative of one sex.

Women often disarm their detractors by admitting the justice of their accusations, and finding in them a license for wilfulness. Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, weighing the merits of her suitors, asks Lucetta "What think'st thou of the gentle Proteus?" Finding he is preferred, she demands "Your reason?" Lucetta replies:

I have no other but a woman's reason;
I think him so because I think him so.¹²⁸

In Middleton's Blurt, Master-Constable, Violetta spurns a dancing-partner: "I have a woman's reason, I will not dance, because I will not dance."¹²⁹ They adopt the satirist's cliché of women's waywardness to justify themselves. In More Dissemblers Besides Women Aurelia, really perfidious, protests loyalty to Andrugio:

More than thyself what woman could desire,
If reason had a part of her creation?¹³⁰

To him the "if" implies fidelity, to her it represents a justification of infidelity. Rosalind's clamorous questioning about Orlando provokes Celia's request: "I would sing my song without a burden - thou bring'st me out of tune." She excuses her own importunity:

¹²⁷ Measure for Measure, II.iv.123.

¹²⁸ The Two Gentlemen of Verona, I.ii.14, 22.

¹²⁹ Thomas Middleton, Blurt, Master-Constable, in I, The Works of Thomas Middleton, I.i.88.

¹³⁰ Middleton, More Dissemblers Besides Women, II.iii.41.

"Do you not know I am a woman? when I think, I must speak."¹³¹

Women deflect satire by embracing it.

The dramatists overlay conventional satire against women with ambiguity through the use of disguise. In Middleton's The Widow Philippa falls in love with Martia who is disguised as a page; to avoid discovery she persuades Martia to 'disguise' herself as a woman: Francisco then falls in love with her. When Martia declares to him "I am a maid, and fearful," his jibe at women's untrustworthiness holds irony for those who think she is a man:

Never truth
Came perfecter from man.

Another character, learning that Philippa and Martia will share the same bed, satirises women's garrulity: "Their tongues will never lin wagging, master,"¹³² - a bawdy innuendo for those who believe in Martia's masculinity. In Epicoene, the bride turned shrew demands: "Why, did you think you had married a statue, or a motion only?" Morose exclaims: "Oh immodesty! A manifest woman".¹³³ The woman so manifested is a boy: disguise makes the satire rebound on the satirist.

Conventional satire spoken by a woman in disguise is at its most comic when Rosalind as Ganymede apes masculine brashness, urging Orlando to adopt her uncle's cure:

He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me: at which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant,

¹³¹ Shakespeare, As You Like It, ed. by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), III.ii.245.

¹³² Middleton, Jonson and Fletcher, The Widow, V.i.265, 203.

¹³³ Jonson, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, III.iv.34, 39.

full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something, and for no passion truly any thing, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour.

This impersonation of a callow youth reveals the genuineness of Orlando's love: "I would not be cured, youth."¹³⁴ Her disguise also allows her to pose as the contrary wife of the male satirist's caricature:

I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more new-fangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey: I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyen, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.

Her femininity expresses itself in whole-hearted abandon to the delight of augmenting male alarm. She harnesses garrulity to her extravaganza: "You shall never take her without her answer unless you take her without her tongue."¹³⁵ Orlando, bemused by the satirist's portrait of his lady, inquires: "But will my Rosalind do so?" Rosalind vouches for its authenticity: "By my life, she will do as I do."¹³⁶ Celia expostulates with this cuckoo satirist:

You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate: we must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest.¹³⁸

Rosalind's advocacy of the satirist's point-of-view simultaneously revivifies and annihilates his clichés.

In Jacobean drama traditional satire on women ceases to be an extra-dramatic encumbrance. The dramatists, confident of their audience's alienation from the idea of woman postulated

¹³⁴ As You Like It, III.ii.397, 413.

¹³⁵ Ibid., IV.i.144, 167. ¹³⁶ Ibid., IV.i.152.

¹³⁷ Ibid., IV.i.196.

in medieval satire, re-set its stereotypes to cast light on their own basically liberal attitudes to women.

CHAPTER VI

ADULTERY AND WHOREDOM

The commitment of Puritans and Humanists to the ideal of married chastity makes them repudiate irregular sexual experience, whether pre-marital or adulterous, with added vigour. Fulminations against fornication and adultery as providing evidence of man's surrender to the bestial in him have always formed a part of theological equipment. But when marriage is seen as the holy union ordained for Adam and Eve in Paradise, surpassing the single state in potential spiritual exaltation, adultery seems sacrilege;¹ whoredom a deliberate rejection of the spiritual and physical union available to man in marriage. It is this attitude of mind which determines the treatment both of whores and adulterous women in the drama.

Moreover, Puritanism, in postulating the ideal of equal fellowship between man and wife, undermines the double standard. Up till the sixteenth century adultery was the accepted corollary to the arranged marriage, openly practised by the husband and tolerated by his wife. This safety-valve was only open to the man; his wife remained sexually, as financially, his exclusive property.² One reason for this double standard was the danger of what Dr. Johnson later called the "confusion of progeny".³ The wife's

¹ Michel Grivelet, Thomas Heywood et Le Drame Domestique Élizabéthain (Paris: Didier, 1957), p. 156.

² Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641, pp. 662, 664.

³ Boswell's Life of Johnson, V, 209, quoted in Thomas, "The Double Standard," p. 209.

bastards would "intrude into the husband's inheritance".⁴ The husband's, on the other hand, as in the case of Edmund in King Lear, were recognized by society as a caste not in competition with legitimate heirs: "He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again."⁵ Leontes' frenzied assertion of Mamillius's bastardy in The Winter's Tale illustrates the male fear of ambiguous breeding which to some extent dictates the double standard.

Puritan disapproval of this socially accepted adultery reiterates that of the early Protestant reformers - such as Becon - who urged the nobility to set an example of godly living. Their propaganda for the reform of inhumane marriage customs attacked the problem at its root. The somewhat ironical consequence for the aristocracy was that the increased reticence about extra-marital affairs forced on them by public opinion, and probably the curtailing of the affairs themselves, resulted in a comparable increase in the number of separations. In the upper classes this tendency was at its most marked during the period 1595 to 1620, when Puritan ideals on marriage were being popularised.⁶

But the pioneers in changing attitudes to the husband's adultery were the middle classes - the social stronghold of Puritanism.⁷ Their opposition to aristocratic libertinism is stimulated partly by their adherence to Puritan idealism about marriage, partly by economic motives: "It took time and money which would have been better spent on the pursuit of gainful

⁴Thomas, ibid.

⁵Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. by Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1952), I.i.32.

⁶Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641, pp. 663, 664, 661.

⁷Ibid., p. 671.

occupation."⁸ Their loathing of adultery is reflected in legislation; in 1650 it was made a capital offence.⁹ They saw it as a crime comparable to murder;¹⁰ in the drama the two frequently go hand in hand. Montsurry prophesies to Tamyra in Bussy D'Ambois:

The chain-shot of thy lust is yet aloft,
And it must murther; 'tis thine own dear twin.¹¹

In The Changeling murder and adultery are inextricably linked: Beatrice - "the deed's creature" - expostulates in vain with De Flores for "such a cunning cruelty / To make his death the murderer of my honour."¹² Indeed, in Middleton's The Witch adultery is adjudged more heinous than murder. The Duchess pleads in her own defence:

Blood I'm guilty of,
But not adultery, not the breach of honour.¹³

When Frank murders his second wife in The Witch of Edmonton, she welcomes her escape:

Die? Oh, 'twas time!
How many yeers might I have slept in sin?
Sin of my most hatred too, Adultery?¹⁴

⁸ Thomas, "The Double Standard," p. 204.

⁹ Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁰ Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, p. 188.

¹¹ Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, p. 170.

¹² Middleton, The Changeling, III.iv.138, 122.

¹³ Thomas Middleton, The Witch, in V, The Works of Thomas Middleton, V.iii.104.

¹⁴ Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley, The Witch of Edmonton, in III, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, III.iii.41.

The law of 1650, however, embodied the double standard by confining the penalty for adultery to women only; this failed to reflect the considerable body of Puritan opinion which condemned the husband equally.¹⁵ Its severity is also, perhaps, misleading about attitudes to adulterous women.

Medieval belief in the greater carnality of woman's nature - in rejecting her man rejects his own baser instincts - saw a confirmation of its tenets in the adulteress. The virtuous woman remained the exception that proved the rule. But for Protestants and Puritans the position is reversed¹⁶: the norm is the virtuous chaste woman; the adulteress represents a deviation. The severity of the law reflects abhorrence of the abnormality of adultery arising partly from greater respect for marriage. This change of direction in estimating the condition of the adulterous woman is a fruitful one for the drama.

The dramatists do not discard the old archetype of the fallen woman who allies herself with the devil; this creature remains in their treatment of certain kinds of whore, and of bawds. But their delineation of adulteresses - and of the whore whose fate provides parallels to that of the adulteress - shows the influence of Puritan attitudes in the questions they ask about

¹⁵ Thomas, "The Double Standard," pp. 203-204. Thorp, The Triumph of Realism in Elizabethan Drama, p. 112, notes that for a time the same penalty held in Puritan New England, but omits to record whether it applied equally to men and women.

¹⁶ Samuel Schoenbaum, "Hengist, King of Kent and the Sexual Preoccupation in Jacobean Drama," Philological Quarterly, XXIX, No. 2 (1950), pp. 190-191, is entirely misleading about the treatment of sexual irregularity in Jacobean drama, since he assumes that Puritanism perpetuated medieval attitudes to women.

sexual irregularity, and the conclusions they reach.

It is worth noting in passing that even the stock figure of evil inherited from the Middle Ages serves the theme of chaste marriage by illustrating the damnableness of sexual passion outside marriage. The whore is often spoken of as a witch, partly because she symbolizes abnormality, and partly because her carnality leagues her with the devil - the conjunction of Eve and the Serpent - just as witches were believed to have made a pact with the devil.¹⁷ The connection between female frailty and witchcraft is made by James I in his Daemonologie: Philomathes asks: "What can be the cause that there are twentie women giuen to that craft, where ther is one man?" Epistemon explains:

The reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer then man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Deuill, as was ouer well proued to be true, by the Serpents deceiuing of Eua at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sexe sensine.¹⁸

The same verbal interchangeability - of witch and whore - persists in the case of bawds, who are seen as superannuated whores trying to reduce others to their own condition. But in their case there are more specific reasons for the parallel.

As applied to whores the term "witch" is largely figurative: Ferdinand in The Duchess of Malfi observes:

For they whose faces do belie their hearts
Are witches, ere they arrive at twenty years -
Ay, and give the devil suck.¹⁹

¹⁷ Paul H. Kocher, Science and Religion in Elizabethan England (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1953), p. 123.

¹⁸ King James the First, Daemonologie, The Bodley Head Quartos, ed. by G. B. Harrison (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1924), pp. 43-44.

¹⁹ Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, I.i.309. It was believed that witches bore an extra teat on their bodies for the

In The Witch of Edmonton Mother Sawyer, accused of being a witch, demands:

A Witch? who is not?
 Hold not that universal name in scorne then.
 What are your painted things in Princes Courts?
 Upon whose Eye-Lids Lust sits blowing fires
 To burn Mens Souls in sensual hot desires:
 Upon whose naked Paps, a Leachers thought
 Acts Sin in fouler shapes then can be wrought.²⁰

In Richard III Richard, in a theatrical passion, blames his deformity on witchcraft:

Look, how I am bewitch'd! behold! mine arm
 Is like a blasted sapling wither'd up:
 And this is Edward's wife that monstrous witch,
 Consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore,
 That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.²¹

Although his naming of the Queen has a different origin, his charge against Mistress Shore would have been considered a legitimate linking of whoredom and witchcraft. Shakespeare satirises the conjunction of whore and witch in The Comedy of Errors where Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio discuss the Courtesan:

Syr. Ant : "It is the devil.
Syr. Drom : "Nay, she is worse, she is the devil's dam;
 And here she comes in the habit of a light
 wench."

Antipholus attempts to exorcise her:

devil to suck. Geoffrey Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p. 69. In the trial of the Lancaster witches in 1612 Anne Whittle, one of the accused, confessed that the "wicked Spirit then sayd vnto her, that hee must haue one part of her body for him to sucke vpon." The Trial of the Lancaster Witches A.D. MDCXII, ed. by G. B. Harrison (London: Peter Davies, 1929), p. 21. In Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton the Dog sucks Mother Sawyer's blood. II.i.142.

²⁰ Dekker, Ford and Rowley, The Witch of Edmonton, IV.i.101.

²¹ The Tragedy of King Richard the Third, III.iv.70.

Avoid then, fiend, what tell'st thou me of supping?
 Thou art, as you are all, a sorceress:
 I conjure thee to leave me and be gone,

and leaves her with "Avaunt, thou witch".²²

Although the term "witch" applied to whores is largely metaphorical, it is not merely a literary figment. It has been argued that the Witches' Sabbath has survived from ancient fertility cults. In the Middle Ages it was certainly attended by young women who seem to have found in it an addictive orgiastic satisfaction.²³ Moreover the testimony at some of the witchcraft trials suggests that the "witches" were being made the scapegoats for the sexual guilt of their accusers. At the trial of William Barton in 1655, William Barton himself described an encounter with a young Gentlewoman:

She suffered me to embrace her, and to do that which Christian ears ought not to hear of. At this time I parted with her very joyful. The next night, she appeared to him in that same very place and after that which should not be named, he became sensible, that it was the Devil.²⁴

On the other hand, the alleged witches were often women of low life with illegitimate children,²⁵ and witchcraft may have been a

²²The Comedy of Errors, IV.iii.48, 63, 76.

²³Margaret Alice Murray, The Witch-Cult in Western Europe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), pp. 25.

²⁴Sinclair, p. 160, quoted in Murray, ibid., p. 46. (Dr. Murray omits to say which volume by Sinclair she is referring to.) A comparable case is cited in The Trial of the Lancaster Witches A.D. MDCXII, p. 36; one Robert Nutter tried to commit adultery with Mrs. Redfearn, daughter of the accused (Anne Whittle), but was spurned. "After which time the sayd Robert Nutter liued about a quarter of a yeare, and then dyed." Anne Whittle was charged with having bewitched him to death.

²⁵Wallace Notestein, A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 40. Also The Trial of the Lancaster Witches A.D. MDCXII, p. 54.

label by which to categorise social outcasts.²⁶ Thus the interchangeability of the terms "whore" and "witch" in the drama has some basis in the witch-trials and witch-hunting of the time.

In the case of the bawd the witch terminology presents a more precise parallelism. The verbal flexibility is still evident. The Wise-woman of Hogsdon is an old bawd who pretends to be a witch for financial profit. Erictho in The Wonder of Women, reputedly a witch, turns out to be a lustful old hag, procuress and whore, rolled into one. Hecate in The Witch, despite her claims of supernatural power, is more bawd than witch. Bawds are often accused of witchcraft - Cassandra in A Wife for a Month, Birdlime in Northward Ho, Malroda in The Martial Maid, Drury in A Warning for Faire Women, to name only a few. The bawd, like the witch, is the progenitor of abnormality. Bellafront cries:

Hence, thou and our sexes monster, poysonous Bawd,
Lusts Factor, and damnations Orator,
Gossip of hell, were all the Harlots sinnes
Which the whole world conteynes, numbred together,
Thine farre exceeds them all: of all creatures
That ever were created, thou art basest:
What serpent would beguile thee of thy Office?²⁷

To this extent the connection between bawd and witch is more than merely verbal.

But in addition bawds and witches have in common the fact of age. The genuine witches in the plays are not the lustful young women, but the a-sexual old hags. They are physically

²⁶The alliance of the idea of the witch, with anything abnormal in nature is evident in the description of Elizabeth Device, accused, in The Trial of the Lancaster Witches A.D. MDCXII, p. 55. "This odious Witch was branded with a preposterous marke in Nature, euen from her birth, which was her left eye, standing lower then the other; the one looking downe, the other looking vp, so strangely deformed, as the best that were present in that Honorable assembly, and great Audience, did affirme, they had not often seene the like."

²⁷Dekker and Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, in II, Works, III.ii.30.

abnormal. Macbeth's weird sisters who

Should be women
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so,²⁸

image Lady Macbeth's repudiation of womanhood. The same characteristic convinces Evans in The Merry Wives of Windsor that Gillian of Brainford, alias Falstaff, is indeed a witch:

By yea and no, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed:
I like not when a 'oman has a great peard; I spy a great
peard under her muffler.²⁹

In The Honest Whore the Servant tells Hippolyto:

Heres a letter from doctor Benedict; I would not enter
his man, tho he had haires at his mouth, for feare he should
be a woman, for some women, haue beardes, mary they are
halfe witches.³⁰

Witches are women who have outlived their sexuality and are therefore unnatural. From this, sorcery is only one step further. Many witches were widows and, by the canons of a society stressing marriage as its norm, obliged to live an abnormal existence. Puritan emphasis on marriage as the proper fulfilment for women may have stimulated witch-hunting at the height of their

²⁸ Shakespeare, Macbeth, ed. by Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1962), I.iii.45.

²⁹ Shakespeare, The Merry Wives of Windsor, ed. by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), IV.ii.187.

³⁰ Dekker and Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, IV.i.183. K. M. Briggs, Pale Hecate's Team: An Examination of the Beliefs on Witchcraft and Magic among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and His Immediate Successors (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 72, points out that "in the illustration to The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcraft of Margaret and Philip Flower old Joan Flower has a beard; but the same writer has not found this used as evidence in witch trials.

influence on moral life.³¹ The old woman, husbandless and infertile, was as abnormal as the celibate or the whore.³² In the plays "witch" as applied to women often means no more than that they are sexually undesirable; Ilford in The Miseries of Enforced Marriage calls Susan:

Whore, ay, and jade. Witch! Ill-faced, stinking-breath, crooked-nose, worse than the devil - and a plague on thee that I ever saw thee.³³

This is why Richard III calls Edward's queen a witch. Maquerelle in The Malcontent alleges that Mendoza called Aurelia, once his love, "witch, dried biscuit", adding that: "At four, women were fools; at fourteen, drabs; at forty, bawds; at fourscore, witches; and [at] a hundred, cats."³⁴ Touchstone in Eastward Ho says of his wife: "She has been my cross these thirty years, and I'll now keep her to fright away sprites, i'faith."³⁵ Gnotho in The Old Law excuses himself for choosing a young bride to replace his old wife:

There's so many of you, that, when you are old, become witches; some profess physic, and kill good subjects faster than a burning fever;³⁶

³¹ Convictions for witchcraft greatly increased during the period after 1590. (Keith Thomas, unpublished paper on Witchcraft).

³² Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African, pp. 62-63 suggests that one reason for suspicion of widows would have been the fear felt by young mothers that these old women would be jealous of them for having children, and would try to revenge their own childlessness. This was true in Africa, and European experience might be analogous.

³³ Wilkins, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, in IX, Dodsley, 550.

³⁴ Marston, The Malcontent, in I, Works, I.ii.18, 34.

³⁵ Chapman, Jonson and Marston, Eastward Ho, p. 473.

³⁶ Middleton, Massinger and Rowley, The Old Law, in II, Works, III.i.282.

Richard III demands of the old Queen Margaret: "Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?"³⁷ The label "witch" is given by society to women who are sexually inadequate through age, and the old women themselves sublimate their frustrated sexuality in quackery.

Gnotho's continuation of his list of the occupations of old women is significant: "An then school-mistresses of the sweet sin, which commonly we call bawds, innumerable of that sort."³⁸ Old women become witches for the same reasons that they become bawds.³⁹ The bawd gratifies her outworn lust vicariously in the irregularities of her clients. She is acutely conscious of her age. Birdlime advises Mrs. Iustiniano:

Strike whilst the iron is hot. A woman when there be roses in her cheekes, Cherries on her lippes, Ciuet in her breath, luory in her teeth, Lyllyes in her hand, and Lickorish in her heart, why shees like a play. If new, very good company, but if stale, like old Ieronimo: goe by, go by.⁴⁰

Mother Sawyer in The Witch of Edmonton, not a bawd, but reputedly a witch, resents the aspersions cast on old women:

Now an old woman
Ill favour'd grown with yeers, if she be poor,
Must be call'd Bawd or Witch.⁴¹

³⁷ The Tragedy of King Richard the Third, I.iii.164.

³⁸ Middleton, Massinger and Rowley, The Old Law, III.i.285.

³⁹ The conjunction of bawd and witch is an old one. She is described by Gower in Mirour de l'Omme, 9493-9504, as one "who, in her old age, when she cannot otherwise afflict men's hearts with love, becomes d'amour la sorceresse. She is a worse diabliesse than the devil himself. He who by her means procures love, devotes himself to Satan and renounces his God"; quoted in George Lyman Kittredge, Witchcraft in Old and New England (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956), pp. 104-105.

⁴⁰ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, in II, Works, II.ii.181.

⁴¹ Dekker, Ford and Rowley, The Witch of Edmonton, IV.i.120.

Her relation to the Dog, however, has sexual undertones: she welcomes him as the ghost of sexual fulfilment in youth:

Why dost thou thus appear to me in white
As if thou wert the Ghost of my dear love?⁴²

Freevill in The Dutch Courtezan warns the young Courtesan:

"Do not turn witch before thy time."⁴³ Witches and bawds alike bear witness to the sexual frustrations of old women forced to live solitary and therefore abnormal lives.

The dramatists use the archetypal whore figure and the bawd to illustrate the fate which attends the rejection of normal and chaste passion within marriage. Men tempted by whores know from what ideal they are falling. Mistress Mary in How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad teaches Arthur:

Only to see the end of such lewd lust,
And know the difference of a chaste wife's bed,
And one whose life is in all looseness led.⁴⁴

He admits that:

I did prefer
A devil before a saint, night before day,
Hell before heaven, and dross before tried gold;
Never was bargain with such damage sold.⁴⁵

In The Dutch Courtezan Freevill turns from his infatuation with Franceschina - "the woman of sin and natural concupiscence"⁴⁶ - to Beatrice, the chaste wife. Whoring is the antithesis of wiving:

⁴² Ibid., V.i.34.

⁴³ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, in II, Works, II.ii.100.

⁴⁴ How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, in IX, Dodsley, 71.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁶ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, III.i.28.

How vile
 To love a creature made of blood and hell,
 Whose use makes weak, whose company doth shame,
 Whose bed doth beggar, issue doth defame.⁴⁷

Vitelli in The Martial Maid marvels at the contradictions in his own nature which allow him to court a whore:

Can I with rational discourse sometimes
 Advance my spirit into Heaven, before
 'T has shook hands with my body, and yet blindly
 Suffer my filthy flesh to master it,
 With sight of fair frail beguiling objects?⁴⁸

Penitent Brothel in A Mad World, my Masters reaffirms the conjunction of whore and devil⁴⁹ and urges chaste married life on the erring Mrs. Harebrain:

Live honest, and live happy, keep thy vows,
 She's part a virgin whom but one man knows.⁵⁰

Hippolyto in The Honest Whore reminds Bellafront

Why those that loue you, hate you: and will terme you
 Lickerish damnation: wish themselves halfe sunke
 After the sin is laid out, and ee'ne curse
 Their fruitlesse riot.⁵¹

The only justification for whores is to highlight the advantages of chaste marriage and by the spectacle of their degradation to deter

⁴⁷ Ibid., V.i.79.

⁴⁸ Beaumont and Fletcher, Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid, in VII, Works, 200.

⁴⁹ Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, IV.iv.57.
 What knows the lecher, when he clips his whore,
 Whether it be the devil his parts adore?
 They're both so like, that, in our natural sense,
 I could discern no change nor difference.

⁵⁰ Ibid., IV.iv.72.

⁵¹ Dekker and Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, in II, Works, II.i.46.

men from forsaking their wives: "I would have married men love the stews as Englishmen loved the Low Countries: wish war should be maintain'd there, lest it should come home to their own doors."⁵²

The fact that both bawds and whores exploit passion for financial gain increases repugnance for them. Freevill in The Dutch Courtezan pretends to protest against Malheureux's definition of a whore as "a money-creature, / One that sells human flesh - a mangonist," asking:

Alas, good creatures! what would you have them do? Would you have them get their living by the curse of man, the sweat of their brows? So they do: every man must follow his trade, and every woman her occupation. . . . Why, is charity grown a sin? or relieving the poor and impotent an offence? You will say beasts take no money for their fleshly entertainment: true, because they are beasts, therefore beastly; only men give to loose, because they are men, therefore manly: and indeed, wherein should they bestow their money better? . . . Employ your money upon women, and, a thousand to nothing, some one of them will bestow that on you which shall stick by you as long as you live. . . . They sell their bodies: do not better persons sell their souls?⁵³

When he sees Malheureux's infatuation he scoffs: "as good make use of a statue - a body without a soul, a carcass three months dead." "They sell but only flesh, / No jot affection."⁵⁴ Cocledemoy describes the bawd, Mary Faugh, as one who "sells divine virtues, as virginity, modesty, and such rare gems; and those not like a petty chapman, by retail, but like a great merchant, by whole-sale." He concludes:

Again, whereas no trade or vocation profiteth but by the loss and displeasure of another . . . only my smooth-gumm'd bawd lives by others' pleasure, and grows rich by others'

⁵² Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, I.i. 72.

⁵³ Marston, ibid., I.i. 103.

⁵⁴ Ibid., II.i. 137, 143.

rising. O merciful gain! O righteous in-come!⁵⁵

In Othello Iago identifies Bianca as

A housewife that by selling her desires
Buys herself bread and clothes.⁵⁶

This trading on passion is a symptom of the cancerous abnormality of bawds and whores in a society recognizing marriage as its moral pivot.

Puritan attitudes to sexual passion may contribute to the conventional denunciation of sex outside marriage; but from the dramatists' point of view, the most significant Puritan assumption is that women are naturally as virtuous or as erring as men. The fallen woman is a phenomenon to be observed and understood, not an exemplum of normal female behaviour.

This preconception influences the dramatists' treatment of adulterous women - and of those whores who are not regarded primarily as archetypal figures, but as individuals - in several ways. In the first place, the playwrights are concerned to establish that adultery is beyond any doubt abnormal; characters are conscious of sacrilege; women sense a betrayal of their own sex; confidence in women's capacity for virtue is attested by some of the characters, and is evident in the dramatists' construction of their plots. The adulteress is attended by the imagery of deformity, and her sin is closely connected with witchcraft: both are unnatural and heinous phenomena.

⁵⁵Ibid., I.ii.39, 144.

⁵⁶Othello, IV.i.94.

Secondly, the dramatists analyse the motives and external pressures which persuade a woman to give way to illicit passion; and thirdly, they tackle the issue of moral responsibility: this involves them in an assessment both of the seducer's situation, and that of the injured husband. The dramatists have to adopt a standpoint in relation to the double standard.

There is no equivocation in these plays about the abnormality of extra-marital or adulterous passion. Adultery blasphemously ruptures a sacred bond. Isabella in The Insatiate Countess is a "sacrilegious thief to Hymen's rites."⁵⁷ Frankford's bedroom in A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse is the place where "the most hallowed order and true knot / Of Nuptiall sanctity hath bene prophan'd."⁵⁸ Sebastian in The Witch declaims:

Better I never knew what comfort were
In woman's love than wickedly to know it.
.....
He that would soul's sacred comfort win
Must burn in pure love, like a seraphin.⁵⁹

Evadne's treachery will discredit Hymen in the eyes of the world: "Not an altar then will smoke / In praise of thee; we will adopt us sons."⁶⁰ Adultery poisons love; the Duke in Women Beware Women longs for the shelter of marriage:

⁵⁷ Marston, The Insatiate Countess, in III, Works, IV.ii.16.

⁵⁸ Heywood, A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse, in II, Works, 137.

⁵⁹ Middleton, The Witch, IV.ii.102.

⁶⁰ Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, II.i.226.

Then will I make her lawfully mine own,
Without this sin and horror. . . .

.
Live like a hopeful bridegroom, chaste from flesh,
And pleasure then will seem new, fair, and fresh.⁶¹

It is "leprosy and foulness" polluting "marriage, that immaculate robe of honour".⁶²

Adulterous women admit their own deformity and are conscious of betraying their sex by laying women open to the charge of carnality. The Queen in Lust's Dominion acknowledges that lust incited her "Beyond the limits of a womans mind / To wrong myself".⁶³ Anne in A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse begs forgiveness "For woman-hood to which I am a shame, / Though once an ornament."⁶⁴ Tamyra admits that "I fly my sex, my virtue, my renown, / To run so madly on a man unknown."⁶⁵

Confidence in women's potential virtue is attested by men and women alike. When Anne, in A Fair Quarrel, urges on Jane the naturalness of yielding to lust: "I must persuade you to this act of woman," her suggestion is angrily repudiated: "Woman? of strumpet!"⁶⁶ In The Dutch Courtezan Franceschina degrades her sex:

⁶¹Middleton, Women Beware Women, in VI, Works, IV.i.274.

⁶²Ibid., IV.iii.17, 14.

⁶³[Dekker, Day and Haughton], Lust's Dominion, or The Lascivious Queen, in IV, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, V.iii.122.

⁶⁴Heywood, A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse, p. 139.

⁶⁵Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, p. 152.

⁶⁶Middleton and Rowley, A Fair Quarrel, in IV, Works, III.ii.148.

Nothing is defamed but by his proper self. Physicians abuse remedies; lawyers spoil the law; and women only shame women.⁶⁷

Antigonus, defending Hermione, insists that:

Every inch of woman in the world,
Ay, every dram of woman's flesh is false
If she be.⁶⁸

Emilia echoes him to Othello:

If she be not honest, chaste and true,
There's no man happy, the purest of her sex
Is foul as slander.⁶⁹

Amintor longs for the comfort of believing that all women are as false as Evadne: "Would I knew it! for the rareness / Afflicts me now."⁷⁰ Even Monticelso in The White Devil hesitates to class all women with Vittoria "Well, well, such counterfeit jewels / Make true ones oft suspected."⁷¹ Troilus protests against the possibility that Cressida's falseness will be used as a yardstick for measuring the fidelity of women in general:

Let it not be believed for womanhood!
Think we had mothers. Do not give advantage
To stubborn critics, apt without a theme
For depravation, to square the general sex
By Cressid's rule; rather think this not Cressid.⁷²

The moral deformity sustained by adulterous women is given a rather obvious physical image. Frankford in A Woman

⁶⁷ Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, III.i.252.

⁶⁸ The Winter's Tale, II.i.137.

⁶⁹ Othello, IV.ii.17.

⁷⁰ Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, III.ii.52.

⁷¹ Webster, The White Devil, III.ii.141.

⁷² Troilus and Cressida, V.ii.129.

Kilde with Kindnesse fears his wife's influence on their children:

Lest as her spotted body
Hath stain'd their names with stripe of bastardy,
So her adulterous breath may blast their spirits
With her infectious thoughts.⁷³

Franklin in Arden of Feversham compares Alice's vice to a
"Hydraes head that flourisht by decay."⁷⁴ Geraldine accuses
Old Wincott's wife in The English Traveller:

How hath thy blacke sins chang'd thee? Thou Medusa,
Those Haires that late appeared like golden Wyers,
Now crawle with Snakes and Adders; Thou art vgly.⁷⁵

Mrs. Iustiniano (really her husband impersonating her) asks Earl,
about to possess her: "Is my face a filthyer face, now it is yours,
then when it was his?"⁷⁶ Beatrice, the "deed's creature", con-
fessing to Alsemero "your love has made me / A cruel murderess,"
"I have kiss'd poison for it, strok'd a serpent," finds her trans-
formation mirrored in his outcry: "O, thou art all deform'd."
At the end she regards herself as "that of your blood was taken
from you / For your better health"; her fate hung "'mongst
things corruptible."⁷⁷ Evadne, repenting before Amintor, cries:

I do present myself the foulest creature,
Most poisonous, dangerous, and despised of men,
Lerna e'er bred or Nilus. I am hell,
Till you, my dear lord, shoot your light into me.⁷⁸

⁷³ Heywood, A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse, p. 140.

⁷⁴ The Lamentable and True Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham, in The Shakespeare Apocrypha, III.i.13.

⁷⁵ Heywood, The English Traveller, in IV, Works, 90.

⁷⁶ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, IV.ii.94.

⁷⁷ Middleton and Rowley, The Changeling, V.iii.65,
67, 78, 153, 158.

⁷⁸ Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, IV.i.232.

But for him her deformity has eaten itself too deeply into her nature to admit a cure: "Black is thy colour now, disease thy nature."⁷⁹ Bianca in Women Beware Women has a similar moment of truth on her deathbed, her features distorted by poison:

My deformity in spirit's more foul,
A blemish'd face best fits a leprous soul.⁸⁰

Even Vittoria is goaded by Brachiano's jealousy to see their love in these terms:

I had a limb corrupted to an ulcer,
But I have cut it off: and now I'll go
Weeping to heaven on crutches.⁸¹

The most unnatural thing would be for moral deformity not to speak through the body. Monsieur in Bussy D'Ambois complains that women's lust is more dangerous because beneath the surface: "Not any wrinkle creaming in their faces / When in their hearts are Scylla and Charybdis."⁸² Anne in A Warning for Faire Women laments:

Are not my deeds ugly?
Let then my faults be written in my face.⁸³

The physical image of deformity in these plays nearly always accompanies moral deviation.

The dramatists incorporate their belief in women's

⁷⁹ Ibid., V.iv.135.

⁸⁰ Middleton, Women Beware Women, V.i.245.

⁸¹ Webster, The White Devil, IV.ii.121.

⁸² Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, p. 159.

⁸³ A Warning for Faire Women, in The School of Shakespeare, ed. by Richard Simpson, II (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878), II.664.

capacity for virtue into their plots. Almost all the plays which feature an adulteress complement her with a chaste woman, often exposed to, but resisting, comparable temptations. Isabella in The Changeling rejects Lollo as a pander to Antonio, thus retaining the independence forfeited by Beatrice to De Flores. In The Malcontent Aurelia's crimes as adulteress are measured by Maria's virtues as the chaste wife. Aspatia's fidelity contrasts with Evadne's pre-meditated treachery. Even the frail Anne Frankford has a strong Susan to rebuke her weakness. In The White Devil the tiresomely virtuous Isabella chastises by her example the attractively vicious Vittoria. Webster's emotional commitment to the character of Vittoria almost jeopardises the conventional morality of the deformed adulteress which he imposes on his plot. But on the whole the dramatists are careful to provide adequate machinery for rebutting accusations of the frailty of women in general.

The adulation of the virtuous woman and the denunciation of adultery as a sacrilege makes the bed-trick a palatable means of thwarting evil practices in these plays. Lauretta's substitution for Julia in A Mayden-Head Well Lost brings about her own chaste marriage, and averts Julia's invalid union - she is pre-contracted and already has a child by another man. Mariana in Measure for Measure legalises her contract with Angelo and rescues Isabella. A double bed-trick in The Fair Maid of the West (Part II) brings husband and wife together for the night under the illusion that they are enjoying adulterous escapades. Helena in All's Well That Ends Well presents her own justification:

Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed,
Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed,
And lawful meaning in a lawful act,
Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ All's Well That Ends Well, III.vii.44.

Her principle is acceptable within the moral framework surrounding marriage and adultery that the dramatists propose.

The belief that adultery is not the normal offspring of female carnality, but rather a prodigious growth in a few individuals, makes it natural for it to be connected with sorcery. The agency of witches seems to explain why passion has failed to fit into the pattern of domestic harmony pre-ordained for it by the Puritans. Often the accrediting of supernatural intervention is disingenuous.⁸⁵ Hippolyto in Women Beware Women explains Isabella's change of heart as sorcery when in fact it is the result of his sister's trickery. Bosola's suggestion that the base-born Antonio has bewitched the Duchess meets Ferdinand's sceptical: "The witchcraft lies in her rank blood."⁸⁶ The more unnatural the union seems, the more witchcraft is blamed - from Sir Alexander Wengrave's dismissal of his son's passion for masculine Moll in The Roaring Girl, and Alice's rejection of her servant-lover Mosbie in Arden of Feversham, to Brabantio's accusation of Othello: "Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her":

She is abus'd, stol'n from me and corrupted,
By spells and medicines, bought of mountebanks,
For nature so preposterously to err,
(Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,)
Sans witchcraft could not.⁸⁷

In many cases witchcraft is no more than metaphor. In Heywood's The Late Lancashire Witches Mrs. Generous is alleged to have been turned into a horse and ridden by her servant:

⁸⁵ The inclination to blame witches for inducing adulterous passion was not confined to the drama. Henry VIII alleged that Anne Boleyn had bewitched him. (Thomas, unpublished paper on Witchcraft.)

⁸⁶ Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, III.i.78.

⁸⁷ Othello, I.ii.63, I.iii.60.

I am sure I found her no jade the last time I rid her,
she carried me the best part of a hundred miles in lesse
then a quarter of an houre.

He accosts her husband:

'Ant please you walke in and take off her Bridle and
then tell me who hath more right to her, you or I. 88

In the same play witchcraft is offered as an explanation for domestic disorder, perhaps in an attempt to explain the failure of Puritan precepts: "This is quite upside downe, the sonne controlls the father, and the man overcrowes his masters cox-combe, sure they are all bewitch'd." ⁸⁹ This is in line with the claim made by Hecate in The Witch that she can raise "Jealousies, strifes, and heart-burning disagreements, / Like a thick scurf o'er life." She annexes also powers over "generation / To strike a barrenness." ⁹⁰

From accrediting witches with power to induce impotence - an argument taken seriously enough for the Countess of Essex to use it to explain her husband's alleged impotence, during their Divorce case ⁹¹ - to believing that they can incite adultery is no far step. James I virtually links the two when he

⁸⁸ Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, The Late Lancashire Witches, in IV, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, 224.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 183.

⁹⁰ Middleton, The Witch, I.ii.173, 150. It was generally accepted - by those who believed in witchcraft - that witches could cause impotence. Murray, The Witch-Cult in Western Europe, p. 24, states that: "Originally for the promotion of fertility, it became degraded into a method for blasting fertility." James I, in his Daemonologie, p. 11, describes the "staying of married folkes, to have naturallie adoe with other, (by knitting so manie knottes upon a poynt at the time of their mariage)."

⁹¹ Notestein, A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718, p. 232.

claims:

Their power is special: as of weakening the nature of some men to make them unable for women: and making it to abound in others, more then the ordinary course of nature would permit.⁹²

In these plays witchcraft is an allegory for the inexplicability of domestic tumult; consequently references to literal witchcraft often sound disingenuous. But the imagery of witchcraft, especially as applied to the adulteress, would have held more weight for an audience at least partly composed of believers, than it can do for sceptics.

The adulteress, like the bawd and the whore, is accused of being a witch because her sin leagues her with the devil. Isabella in The Insatiate Countess is: "That vild adulteress whose sorceries / Doth draw chaste men into incontinence"⁹³; the Queen in Lust's Dominion "bewitch'd" Eleazar "to the circle of thy arms."⁹⁴ The devil compact is explicit in Geraldine's accusation in The English Traveller:

Thou Adultresse,
Thou hast more poyson in thee then the Serpent,
Who was the first that did corrupt thy sex,
The Deuill.⁹⁵

Brachiano's tribute to Vittoria's power ends affirming the medieval view of women:

How long have I beheld the devil in crystal?
Thou hast led me, like an heathen sacrifice,

⁹² James I, ibid., Preface, xiii.

⁹³ Marston, The Insatiate Countess, V.i. 11.

⁹⁴ [Dekker, Day and Haughton], Lust's Dominion, or, The Lascivious Queen, V.iii. 156.

⁹⁵ Heywood, The English Traveller, pp. 89-90.

With music, and with fatal yokes of flowers
 To my eternal ruin. Woman to man
 Is either a god or a wolf.⁹⁶

Cleopatra is a "great fairy", Antony "the noble ruin of her magic";
 Pompey wills that

All the charms of love,
 Salt Cleopatra, soften thy wan'd lip!
 Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both,
 Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts.⁹⁷

But here witchcraft is essentially metaphor, however strong its emotive associations. With most of the dramatists the accusation of witchcraft is emotionally evocative rather than literal, and too often degenerates into histrionic cliché. It images the abnormality of adulterous passion rather than explaining it.

The repudiation of the idea of generic female frailty leads the dramatists to explore the motives and external inducements which prompt individual women to commit adultery. Among these the fact of womanhood is important, not because it dictates an a priori moral weakness, but because society imposes certain conditions of life on women.

Women are traditionally the passive sex, men the active. But the adulterous wife becomes the actor and forces her husband into passivity. Thus adultery may be her way of protesting against the inactivity imposed on her by women's role in society. The Duchess in The Witch contemplates adultery as the only means by

⁹⁶ Webster, The White Devil, IV.ii.88.

⁹⁷ Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, ed. by M. R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1954), IV.viii.12, III.x.19, II.i.20.

which she can revenge herself against her husband's cruelty.

Bianca's adultery in Women Beware Women is an act of rebellion against the restrictions of a woman's life:

Restraint

Breeds wandering thoughts, as many fasting days

A great desire to see flesh stirring again.

I'll ne'er use any girl of mine so strictly.⁹⁸

Isabella in The White Devil, simulating fury, bursts out: "O that I were a man, or that I had a power / To execute my apprehended wishes, / I would whip some with scorpions."⁹⁹ Vittoria's defence of herself in Court obliges her in apparent opposition to "modesty" and "womanhood" to "personate masculine virtue",¹⁰⁰ and by assuming an activity inappropriate to woman, to reinforce the emotional conviction in the mind of her judges that she is guilty of adultery. Moreover a woman's protest against injustice can only be a verbal one:

O woman's poor revenge
Which dwells but in the tongue.¹⁰¹

Evadne's retort to the King's accusations is the same: "I am no man / To answer with a blow."¹⁰²

The result is that women exploit their physical weakness and inability to act by enslaving some man who will then act for them. Their energy is diverted into plotting deeds for others, and if possible evading responsibility for the event. Beatrice's

⁹⁸ Middleton, Women Beware Women, IV.i.32.

⁹⁹ Webster, The White Devil, II.i.243.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., III.ii.132, 133, 136.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., III.ii.283.

¹⁰² Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, III.i.207.

carefully timed lament "Would creation . . . / Had form'd me
man" brings her an agent:

Without change to your sex you have your wishes;
Claim so much man in me.¹⁰³

Alice in Arden of Feversham lines up her candidates for murdering her husband, each assuring her: "I shall be the man / Shall set you free from all this discontent."¹⁰⁴ Aurelia in The Malcontent plans for Mendoza, her lover, to murder her husband as a revenge for his exposing of her guilt. Evadne ironically asks Amintor if he is willing to kill the man who has wronged her, only to taunt him:

Why, it is thou that wrong'st me; I hate thee;
Thou should'st have kill'd thyself.¹⁰⁵

The normal situation is reversed; the husband is enlisted to act against himself as the man about to wrong the lover.

Women who enact their own plots either assume a male disguise - Aspatia in The Maid's Tragedy - or preface their action with a ritual rejection of their womanhood. Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here"¹⁰⁶ finds its counterpart in Evadne's denial to the King she is about to murder:

I am not she; nor bear I in this breast
So much cold spirit to be call'd a woman:
I am a tiger.¹⁰⁷

Men are slow to credit even an adulterous woman with

¹⁰³ Middleton and Rowley, The Changeling, II.ii.108, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Arden of Feversham, I.i.513.

¹⁰⁵ Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, II.i.187.

¹⁰⁶ Macbeth, I.v.41.

¹⁰⁷ Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, V.ii.52.

physical violence. The King's attendants, in The Maid's Tragedy, anticipate: "This will be laid on us: who can believe / A woman could do this?" Cleon's response to their information - "There her woeful act / Lies still" - is incredulous: "Her act! a woman!"¹⁰⁸ Vittoria's responsibility in Camillo's death, in reality a moral but not a physical one, is brushed aside:

I do not think she hath a soul so black
To act a deed so bloody.¹⁰⁹

In fact physical violence is an offshoot of the same impulse - frustration at the passivity of a woman's lot - as adultery itself.

The passivity imposed on the cuckold is as unnatural as the activeness of the adulteress. Scorn of cuckolds in these plays complements denigration of the adulteress and underlines the equal responsibility meted out in the Puritan ethic to husband and wife in the breaking of a marriage. In an extreme case the husband who condones his wife's infidelity - Allwit in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside - is ridiculed. But even a man irreproachable in his own conduct carries the stigma of implication in his wife's irregularity: his role of passivity is also an abnormal one. Hence Amintor's horror of being known to have endured cuckoldry patiently:

On me that have walk'd
With patience in it, it will fix the name
Of fearful cuckold. Oh, that word!¹¹⁰

Malevole in The Malcontent taunts the cuckolded Pietro "O God, for a woman to make a man that which God never created, never made," and answers his query with:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., V.ii.115, 118.

¹⁰⁹ Webster, The White Devil, III.ii.183.

¹¹⁰ Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, III.ii.230.

A cuckold: to be made a thing that's hoodwinked with kindness, whilst every rascal fillips his brows; to have a coxcomb with egregious horns pinned to a lord's back, every page sporting himself with delightful laughter, whilst he must be the last must know it.¹¹¹

Alsemero is a mere spectator of Beatrice and De Flores' lust.

I'll be your pander now; rehearse again
Your scene of lust.¹¹²

Leantio in Women Beware Women launches on his affair with Livia in order to obliterate the image of his own passivity. For Othello cuckoldry means disintegration; he loses his own identity as a man of action:

O now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content:
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
That make ambition virtue: O farewell,
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife;
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And, O ye mortal engines, whose wide throats
The immortal Jove's great clamour counterfeit;
Farewell, Othello's occupation's gone.¹¹³

The dramatists enumerate the temptations which may succeed in diverting a woman from virtue. Among the most powerful are money and social ambition.

Money is the chief incentive to whoredom. Laxton in

¹¹¹ Marston, The Malcontent, I.i. 135, 138.

¹¹² Middleton and Rowley, The Changeling, V.iii. 115.

¹¹³ Othello, III.iii. 353.

The Roaring Girl is confident of buying Moll: "Money is that aquafortis that eats into many a maidenhead; where the walls are flesh and blood, I'll ever pierce through with a golden augre."¹¹⁴

Whores must not be squeamish:

Money can make a slaving tongue speak plain.
If he that loves thee be deform'd and rich,
Accept his love: gold hides deformity.¹¹⁵

Livia in Women Beware Women persuades Leantio of the folly of marrying for love: "Such a marriage rather / Proves the destruction of affection; / It brings on want, and want's the key of whoredom."¹¹⁶

Mrs. Knavesby in Anything for a Quiet Life considers the advantages that Lord Beaufort can offer her - "He'll put me into brave clothes and rich jewels" - and pretends to skim over the price she will have to pay for them: "What I'll do there, a'my troth, yet I know not."¹¹⁷ Ianicula in Patient Grissill fears the Marquis's motives in measuring Grissill for new clothes:

Whie should he send his tailors to take measure
Of Grissils bodie: but as one should say,
If thou wilt be the Marquesse concubine,
Thou shalt weare rich attires.¹¹⁸

Some women manage to resist this lure, however. Mrs. Iustiniano in Westward Ho indignantly repulses Earl:

¹¹⁴ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, in IV, Works, II.i.199.

¹¹⁵ How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, p. 37.

¹¹⁶ Middleton, Women Beware Women, III.ii.283.

¹¹⁷ Middleton, Anything for a Quiet Life, in V, Works, II.i.190, 193.

¹¹⁸ Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, Patient Grissill, in I, Works, I.ii.61.

Henceforth cease to throw out golden hookes
 To choake mine honor: tho my husbands poore,
 Ile rather beg for him, then be your Whore,¹¹⁹

and apostrophises poverty as the "bane of Chastity":

I see when Force, nor Wit can scale the hold,
 Wealth must. Sheele nere be won, that defies golde.
 But liues there such a creature: Oh tis rare,
 To finde a woman chast, thats poore and faire.¹²⁰

Castiza in The Revenger's Tragedy resists her mother's attempts to persuade her to be ruled by self-interest. Mrs. Low-water, in No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, determines on strategy to relieve her poverty, rather than whoredom: "Must I to whoredom or to beggary lean, / My mind being sound? is there no way to miss it?"¹²¹

Social ambition often lies behind women's weakness. Country girls and tradesmen's daughters become city whores in the hope of going like ladies. Mistress Newcut accosts the Second Courtesan in Your Five Gallants:

Pray, were not you a feltmonger's daughter at first, that run away with a new courtier for the love of gentlewomen's clothes, and bought the fashion at a dear rate, with the loss of your name and credit? Why, what are all of you but rustical insides and city flesh, the blood of yeomen, and the bum of gentlewomen?¹²²

The Country Wench in Michaelmas Term assures Hellgill, her pander: "If I had not a desire to go like a gentle-woman, you should be hanged ere you should get me to't, I warrant you."¹²³

¹¹⁹ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, II.ii.118.

¹²⁰ Ibid., II.ii.142, 144.

¹²¹ Middleton, No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's, I.ii.14.

¹²² Middleton, Your Five Gallants, in III, Works, V.i.23.

¹²³ Middleton, Michaelmas Term, in I, Works, I.ii.30.

Such women are often ruined by a courtly seducer. Maquerelle in The Malcontent describes the "promise of matrimony by a young gallant, to bring a virgin lady into a fool's paradise; make her a great woman, and then cast her off."¹²⁴ Proditor in The Phoenix speaks of the elevation of the whore to a position of rank: "She's never lewd that is accounted great."¹²⁵

In many such cases the tempting courtier is an outsider in a bourgeois environment. When he offers his bribes in the world of the Court itself they are harder to resist. The morality of the Court decries poverty more than lechery. Vittoria is enriched by Brachiano:

Her husband is lord of a poor fortune
Yet she wears cloth of tissue.¹²⁶

Bianca in Women Beware Women yields to the Duke after he has represented to her her own poverty and in consequence following her marriage to the obscure Leantio. She faces her husband with:

Wives do not give away themselves to husbands
To the end to be quite cast away; they look
To be the better us'd and tender'd rather,
Highlier respected, and maintain'd the richer;
They're well rewarded else for the free gift
Of their whole life to a husband.¹²⁷

Evadne admits her own ambitions to the king:

I swore indeed that I would never love
A man of lower place; but, if your fortune
Should throw you from this height, I bade you trust
I would forsake you, and would bend to him

¹²⁴ Marston, The Malcontent, V.iii.141.

¹²⁵ Middleton, The Phoenix, in I, Works, V.i.31.

¹²⁶ Webster, The White Devil, II.i.54.

¹²⁷ Middleton, Women Beware Women, III.i.47.

That won your throne: I love with my ambition
Not with my eyes. 128

She blames the Court as much as the King for her fall:

I was a world of virtue,
Till your cursed court and you (Hell bless you for't!)
With your temptations on temptations
Made me give up mine honour. 129

Her feeling is echoed by the dying Vittoria "O happy they that
never saw the court." 130

There are several reasons why the moral climate of the Court is so damaging to virtue - and often the exposing of aristocratic corruption seems the reproof of a middle-class dramatist writing for a bourgeois audience, aware of the debaucheries of James I's Court. The dramatists see the moral debility of the Court as the direct consequence of its physical luxury. Idleness and rich food and drink stimulate lust. 131 Leantio observes the unfaithful Bianca:

I see 'tis plain lust now, adultery 'bolden'd;
What will it prove anon, when 'tis stuff'd full
Of wine and sweetmeats, being so impudent fasting? 132

His fears are expanded in Malevole's picture of the corrupting influence of Court life:

128 Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, III.i.188.

129 Ibid., V.ii.66.

130 Webster, The White Devil, V.vi.261.

131 Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642, Studies in Language and Literature (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), pp. 130-131.

132 Middleton, Women Beware Women, III.ii.34.

A lady guardianless
 Left to the push of all allurements,
 The strongest incitements to immodesty,
 To have her bound, incens'd with wanton sweets,
 Her veins fill'd high with heating delicacies,
 Soft rest, sweet music, amorous masquerers,
 Lascivious banquets, sin itself gilt o'er,
 Strong fantasy tricking up strange delights,
 Presenting it dress'd pleasingly to sense,
 Sense leading it unto the soul, confirm'd
 With potent examples impudent custom,
 Entic'd by that great bawd, opportunity;
 Thus being prepar'd, clap to her easy ear
 Youth in good clothes, well-shap'd, rich,
 Fair-spoken, promising, noble, ardent, blood-full,
 Witty, flattering, - Ulysses absent,
 O Ithaca, can chastest Penelope hold out?¹³³

The irresistible courtier described by Malevole is an unscrupulous seducer. Isabella in The White Devil is "pursued . . . with hot lust"¹³⁴ by Lodovico. Monsieur in Bussy D'Ambois derides Tamyra's rebuff:

Still you stand on your husband, so do all
 The common sex of you, when y'are encounter'd
 With one ye cannot fancy

 . . . If your husband's pleasure
 Be all your object, and you aim at honour
 In living close to him, get you from Court.
 You may have him at home; these common put-offs
 For common women serve: my honour? husband?
 Dames maritorious ne'er were meritorious:
 Speak plain, and say "I do not like you, sir."

She retorts:

Y'are a vile fellow, and I'll tell the king
 Your occupation of dishonouring ladies
 And of his Court: a lady cannot live
 As she was born, and with that sort of pleasure
 That fits her state, but she must be defamed

¹³³ Marston, The Malcontent, III.i.191.

¹³⁴ Webster, The White Devil, IV.iii.112.

With an infamous lord's detraction;
 Who would endure the Court if these attempts
 Of open and profess'd lust must be borne? ¹³⁵

Such men lard their suit with the flattering romanticism abhorred by the Humanists. Malevole affirms that he has seen in the Court "lust so confirm'd / That the black act of sin itself not sham'd / To be term'd courtship." ¹³⁶ Earl in Westward Ho eulogizes women before his attempted seduction of Mrs. Iustiniano:

A woman! Oh, the Spirit
 And extract of Creation! This, this night,
 The Sun shall envy
 Her bodie is the Chariot of my soule,
 Her eies my bodies light,

although he is aware that:

If possesse, I vndo her:
 Turn her into a diuel, whom I adore,
 By scorching her with the hot steeme of lust.
 Tis but a minutes pleasure: and the sinne
 Scarce acted is repented. ¹³⁷

Flamineo sneers at idolatry of the adulterous woman: "What an ignorant ass or flattering knave might he be counted, that should write sonnets to her eyes, or call her brow the snow of Ida, or ivory of Corinth, or compare her hair to the blackbird's bill, when 'tis liker the blackbird's feather." ¹³⁸ Romanticism undermines virtue as treacherously as luxurious living.

Among the external pressures which induce an apparently virtuous woman to commit adultery are the plots of the interested third party. This may be the professional bawd, whose motive is profit - Drury in A Warning for Faire Women, "the accursed fiend /

¹³⁵ Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois, pp. 150-151.

¹³⁶ Marston, The Malcontent, V.iii.182.

¹³⁷ Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, IV.ii.38, 43.

¹³⁸ Webster, The White Devil, I.ii.115.

That thrusts her [Anne] forward to destruction,"¹³⁹ - or another woman. Both Bianca and Isabella in Women Beware Women are the victims of Livia's manipulation. Guardiano, her agent in the plot against Bianca, muses: "Never were finer snares for women's honesties / Than are devis'd in these days";¹⁴⁰ Bianca lays the nemesis that overtakes her at Livia's door:

O, the deadly snares
That women set for women, without pity
Either to soul or honour! learn by me
To know your foes: in this belief I die, -
Like our own sex we have no enemy.¹⁴¹

Isabella's fate is also her doing:

Was ever maid so cruelly beguil'd,
To the confusion of life, soul, and honour,
All of one woman's murdering.¹⁴²

The initial responsibility for her fall may not lie solely with the adulterous woman herself.

The dramatists face the issue of responsibility for a woman's deviation from virtue - whether whore or adulteress - squarely in these plays. This leads them to assess both the seducer's part in the situation, and the husband's. The outcome is an assertion of a single standard for men and women.

Men who make whores but marry virgins are condemned in these plays. Bellafront in The Honest Whore laments her own promiscuity:

¹³⁹ A Warning for Faire Women, II. 35.

¹⁴⁰ Middleton, Women Beware Women, II.ii.42.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., V.i.253.

¹⁴² Ibid., IV.ii.130.

Had I but met with one kind gentleman,
 That would haue purchacde sin alone, to himselfe,
 For his owne priuate vse, although scarce proper:

 I would haue bin as sure vnto his pleasures,
 Yea, and as loyall to his afternoones,
 As euer a poore gentlewoman could be.¹⁴³

Matheo, her first seducer, scoffs at the idea that he should marry her: "How, marry with a Punck, a Cockatrice, a Harlot? mary foh, Ile be burnt thorow the nose first." But though her pleading fails to move him "You loue to make us lewd, but neuer chaste",¹⁴⁴ her resourcefulness tricks him into having to accept the Duke's judgment:

Its better
 To take a common wench, and make her good,
 Than one that simpers, and at first, will scarce
 Be tempted forth ouer the threshold dore,
 Yet in one sennight, zounds, turnes arrant whore.¹⁴⁵

The same retribution attends Lethe in Michaelmas Term:

Who for his wife his harlot doth prefer,
 Good reason 'tis that he should marry her.¹⁴⁶

The boasting whore-monger, Perez, in Rule a Wife and Have a Wife is tricked by a whore into marriage with her. The Courtesan in A Trick to Catch the Old One finds the same weak spot - avarice - in Hoard, and gulls him into marrying her.

All these whores have in common the determination to reform and become exemplary wives. They long to be readmitted to the norm accepted by society. The Welshwoman in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside reminds Tim:

¹⁴³ Dekker and Middleton, The Honest Whore, Part I, II.i.268.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., III.iii.116, 120.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., V.ii.445.

¹⁴⁶ Middleton, Michaelmas Term, V.iii.105.

Sir, if your logic cannot prove me honest,
There is a thing call'd marriage, and that makes me honest.¹⁴⁷

Doll in Northward Ho assures Fetherstone: "I will bee as true to thee, as Ware and Wades-mill are one to another."¹⁴⁸ Follywit's Courtesan in A Mad World, my Masters comforts him, promising: "What I have been is past; be that forgiven, / And have a soul true both to thee and heaven!"¹⁴⁹ The Courtesan in A Trick to Catch the Old One even argues that a whore makes a chaster wife:

Nor am I so deform'd, but I may challenge
The utmost power of any old man's love,
She that tastes not sin before twenty, twenty to one but
she'll taste it after: most of you old men are content to
marry young virgins, and take that which follows; where,
marrying one of us, you both save a sinner and are quit
from a cuckold for ever:

.
She that knows sin, knows best how to hate sin.¹⁵⁰

The admission of deformity by all these women is the password for their re-admission into respectable society.

In the case of the adulterer the dramatists emphasise that the man's guilt is as heinous as the woman's. The imagery surrounding the adulterer stresses bestiality and unnaturalness. Revel in The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois asserts:

'Tis more than nature's mighty hand can do
To make one humane and a lecher too.
Look how a wolf doth like a dog appear,
So like a friend is an adulterer:

¹⁴⁷ Middleton, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, in V, Works, V.iv.104.

¹⁴⁸ Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, in II, Works, V.i.503.

¹⁴⁹ Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, V.ii.286.

¹⁵⁰ Middleton, A Trick to Catch the Old One, in II, Works, V.ii.146.

Voluptuaries, and these belly-gods,
No more true men are than so many toads.¹⁵¹

Evadne calls the King "a thing out of the overcharge of nature,"
and an "untemperate beast."¹⁵² Sophonisba in The Wonder of
Women taunts Syphax: "Be but a beast."¹⁵³ Mrs. Openwork in
The Roaring Girl calls Goshawk:

Thou spider that hast woven thy cunning web
In mine own house t'ensnare me! hast not thou
Suck'd nourishment even underneath this roof,
And turn'd it all to poison, spitting it
On thy friend's face, my husband.¹⁵⁴

Young Arthur in How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad
is "like one, that over a sweet face / Puts a deformed vizard."¹⁵⁵
The guilty man is as deformed as the guilty woman.

The adulteress often blames her lover for her fall, and
society abets her in the accusation. Vittoria demands of Brachiano
"What have I gain'd by thee but infamy?" and goads him: "Go, go
brag / How many ladies you have undone, like me."¹⁵⁶ Monticelso
rebukes him as severely as he chastises Vittoria:

It is a wonder to your noble friends,
That you . . .
.
. . . should in your prime age
Neglect your awful throne, for the soft down
Of an insatiate bed,

¹⁵¹ Chapman, The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, p. 200.

¹⁵² Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, V.ii.79, 14.

¹⁵³ Marston, The Wonder of Women, or, The Tragedy of
Sophonisba, in II, Works, III.i.18.

¹⁵⁴ Middleton and Dekker, The Roaring Girl, IV.ii.206.

¹⁵⁵ How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, p. 46.

¹⁵⁶ Webster, The White Devil, IV.ii.107, 118.

and admonishes him: "When you awake from this lascivious dream / Repentance then will follow."¹⁵⁷ Evadne's denunciation of the King is upheld not only by her family, but by the Court. Eleazar in Lust's Dominion is represented as a devilish creature. Alice in Arden of Feversham turns Mosbie's abuse of her as a strumpet back in his face:

Ah, but for thee I had neuer beene strumpet.
What can not oathes and protestations doe,
When men haue opportunity to woe?
I was too young to sound thy villanies,
But now I finde it and repent too late.¹⁵⁸

The adulterer himself often acknowledges equal, if not greater, guilt than the woman he has seduced. Browne in A Warning for Faire Women prefaces his actions with:

My guilty soul, burnt with lust's hateful fire,
Must wade through blood t'obtain my vile desire.¹⁵⁹

After the event he cries "I am damn'd for this unhallowed deede."¹⁶⁰ Wendoll in A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse reasons with himself:

Then to attempt the deede,
Slaue thou art damn'd without redemption.¹⁶¹

There is no extenuation of the woman's guilt, but the man shares the responsibility for it.

The dramatists' appreciation of the ways in which a husband may to some extent be responsible for his wife's adultery also strikes at the double standard.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., II.i. 26, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Arden of Feversham, V.v. 14.

¹⁵⁹ A Warning for Faire Women, II. 100.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., II. 519.

¹⁶¹ Heywood, A Woman Kilde with Kindnesse, p. 108.

In cases where the husband is impotent or imbecile the marriage itself is an abnormal one which lessens the unnaturalness of the woman's recourse to adultery. Camillo's impotence and idiocy in The White Devil is one element in the situation between Vittoria and Brachiano.¹⁶² In The Fawn Garbetza's adultery with Herod is treated compassionately as a means of escape from her syphilitic husband. Isabella's adultery in Women Beware Women is not more culpable than her forced union with an imbecile ward.

Many plays show husbands provoking their wives to adultery through their unjust treatment of them. This may take the form of an excessive trial of the wife's virtue - Iustiniano in Westward Ho - fanatical ungrounded jealousy, or the man's own loose living while demanding chastity from his wife.

Jealous husbands of irreproachable wives are thick on the ground. Bellamont in Northward Ho denounces Maybery:

I wud giue two peeces of Plate, to haue you stand by me, when I were to write a iealous mans part: Iealous men are eyther knaues or Coxcombes, bee you neither: you weare yellow hose without cause.¹⁶³

Kitely's dilemma in Every Man In his Humour is comic. Hearing Well-bred refer to Nessus' shirt, he fancies himself poisoned by his wife:

¹⁶² Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 187, asserts that: "When we first see her [Vittoria] with Brachiano the adultery is obviously right from any but a puritanical point of view", but she misinterprets Flamineo's impact on the scene, and distorts Webster's intention. She quotes Flamineo's ironic "See, now they close. Most happy union," as though it expressed this devious cynic's guileless pleasure in romance. Moreover the modern concept "puritanical" obscures the real influence of Puritanism in determining Webster's assumptions about sexual morality.

¹⁶³ Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, I.iii.35.

Am I not sicke? how am I, then, not poyson'd? Am I not poyson'd? how am I, then, so sicke?

Dame Kitely: If you be sicke, youre owne thoughts make you sicke.

Well-bred : His iealousie is the poyson, he ha's taken.

His friends' verdict on his situation is that "the house is so stor'd with iealousie, there is no roome for loue, to stand vpright in."¹⁶⁴

Alibius' jealous wardenship of his wife in The Changeling almost induces her to revenge her affronted virtue by being as fickle as he imagines her. Mrs. Harebrain in A Mad World, my Masters - "Over whose hours and pleasures her sick husband, / With a fantastic but deserv'd suspect, / Bestows his serious time in watch and ward,"¹⁶⁵ - regards his vigilance as a challenge and follows the Courtesan's advice:

When husbands in their rank'st suspicions dwell,
Then 'tis our best art to dissemble well.¹⁶⁶

Middleton sees her adultery as a fit rejoinder to her husband's jealousy.

This jealousy is sometimes answered by trickery. In Westward Ho and Anything for a Quiet Life two husbands importune virtuous wives to confess their infidelities. Iustiniano complains:

I haue sat a whol afternoone many times by my wife, and lookt vpon her eies, and felt if her pulses haue beat, when I haue nam'd a suspected loue, yet all this while haue not drawne from her the least scruple of confession. I haue laine awake a thousand nights, thinking she wold haue reuealed somewhat in her dreames, and when she has begunne to speake anything in her sleepe, I haue iog'd her, and cried I sweete hearte. But when wil your loue come, or what did hee say to thee ouer the stall? Or what did he do to thee in the Garden-chamber?

¹⁶⁴ Jonson, Every Man In his Humour, Folio of 1616, IV. viii. 38, 65.

¹⁶⁵ Middleton, A Mad World, my Masters, I. i. 106.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., I. ii. 79.

Or when will he send to thee any letters, or when wilt thou send to him any mony.¹⁶⁷

Knavesby wheedles his wife to admit indiscretions. Both men are tricked into thinking that their suspicions have been fulfilled, although in fact both wives remain chaste. The playwright's verdict is against the husband for his provoking of rebellion. As Mrs. Iustiniano cries: "You shall answer for this sinne which you force mee to; fare you well, let not the world condemne me, if I seeke for mine owne maintenance."¹⁶⁸ Mrs. Knavesby retorts to her husband: "You shall see me play the changeling."¹⁶⁹ Mistress Ford in The Merry Wives of Windsor simultaneously medicines her husband's jealousy and routs the lustful fat knight. She and Mistress Page revel in Ford's excesses: Mistress Page, warning her friend of her husband's approach on the occasion of Falstaff's second visit, remarks:

Why, woman, your husband is in his old lunes again: he so takes on yonder with my husband; so rails against all married mankind; so curses all Eve's daughters, of what complexion soever; and so buffets himself on the forehead, crying, 'Peer out, peer out!' that any madness I ever yet beheld seemed but tameness, civility, and patience, to this his distemper he is in now.¹⁷⁰

Ford ends asking forgiveness, and granting his wife a charter of freedom:

Pardon me, wife. Henceforth do what thou wilt:
I rather will suspect the sun with cold
Than thee with wantonness: now doth thy honour stand,
In him that was of late an heretic,
As firm as faith.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, III.iii.42.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., I.i.203.

¹⁶⁹Middleton, Anything for a Quiet Life, II.i.70.

¹⁷⁰The Merry Wives of Windsor, IV.ii.19.

¹⁷¹Ibid., IV.iv.6.

One of the best examples of a jealous husband is Cornelio in Chapman's All Fools. His wife Gratiana complains:

Indeed, such love is like a smoky fire
In a cold morning; though the fire be cheerful,
Yet is the smoke so sour and cumbersome,
'Twere better lose the fire than find the smoke:
Such an attendant then as smoke to fire,
Is jealousy to love; better want both
Than have both. ¹⁷²

To her husband she exclaims:

Jesus! what moods are these? did ever husband
Follow his wife with jealousy so unjust?
That once I loved you, you yourself will swear;
And if I did, where did you lose my love?
Indeed, this strange and undeserved usage
Hath power to shake a heart were ne'er so settled;
But I protest all your unkindness never
Had strength to make me wrong you but in thought. ¹⁷³

Cornelio's Page reasons with him: "Turn your eye into yourself . . . and weigh your own imperfections with hers. If she be wanton abroad, are not you wanting at home?" ¹⁷⁴ In a passage worthy of Ester Sovernam, he attributes alarmism about cuckoldry to the spleen of satirists:

Now, sir, for these cuckooish songs of yours, of cuckolds, horns, grafting, and such-like; what are they but mere imaginary toys, bred out of your own heads, as your own, and so by tradition delivered from man to man, like scarecrows, to terrify fools from this earthly paradise of wedlock, coined at first by some spent poets, superannuated bachelors, or some that were scarce men of their hands; who, like the fox, having lost his tail, would persuade others to lose theirs for company? ¹⁷⁵

Cornelio arranges to divorce his wife but is hindered by a timely nose-bleed. The play ends in reconciliation:

¹⁷² George Chapman, All Fools, in The Works of George Chapman, p. 53.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

Live merrily together, and agree.
Horns cannot be kept off with jealousy. 176

Jealousy fractures good-will and achieves nothing. As Isabella reflects in The Changeling:

Would a woman stray,
She need not gad abroad to seek her sin,
It would be brought home one way or other. 177

Husbands come to realise, like Alibius, that they must "change now / Into a better husband." 178 The dramatists' sympathy is with the women.

The dramatists also condemn husbands who work a double standard in their own marriage, demanding chastity in their wives as a counterpart to their own loose living. In Northward Ho Greenshield, a rake, is brought face to face with his wife's adultery and has to accept her bold equivocation: "My deare vnkinde husband; I protest to thee I haue playd this knauish part only to be witty." Bellamont reads him his lesson: "What is more Catholick ith Citty then for husbands daily for to forgiue, the nightly sins of their bedfellowes: if you like not that course but do intend to be rid of her." 179 Kate, belatedly proclaimed chaste, goes off to make him indeed a cuckold, and the play's moral is that:

This curse is on all letchers throwne
They giue hornes and at last, hornes are their owne. 180

In Westward Ho the three husbands use their wives' absence to

176 Ibid., p. 76.

177 Middleton and Rowley, The Changeling, III.iii.224.

178 Ibid., V.iii.117.

179 Dekker and Webster, Northward Ho, V.i.231, 312.

180 Ibid., IV.i.281.

Crispinella in The Dutch Courtezan complains "If our husbands be proud, we must bear his contempt; if noisome, we must bear with the goat under his armholes; if a fool, we must bear his babble; and, which is worse, if a loose liver, we must live upon unwholesome reversions; where, on the contrary side, our husbands . . . care not for us."¹⁸² Tolerance of Brachiano's faithlessness is preached to Isabella: "Look upon other women, with what patience / They suffer these slight wrongs."¹⁸³ Tamyra cries:

Livia in Women Beware Women points out that the husband:

¹⁸¹Dekker and Webster, Westward Ho, V.iv.237.

¹⁸²Marston, The Dutch Courtezan, IV.i.33.

¹⁸³Webster, The White Devil, II.i.240.

¹⁸⁴Chapman, The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, p. 185.

¹⁸⁵Middleton, Women Beware Women, I.ii.40.

Hercules' rebuke to Zuccone in The Fawn is an eloquent plea on women's behalf for a single standard:

He that upon vain surmise forsakes
 His bed thus long, only to search his shame;
 Gives to his wife youth, opportunity,
 Keeps her in idleful deliciousness,
 Heats and inflames imagination,
 Provokes her to revenge with churlish wrongs -
 What should he hope but this? Why should it lie in women,
 Or even in chastity itself (since chastity's a female),
 T'avoid desires so ripened, such sweets so candied?
 But she that hath out-born such mass of wrongs,
 Out-dured all persecutions, all contempts,
 Suspects, disgrace, all wants, and all the mischief,
 The baseness of a canker'd churl could cast upon her,
 With constant virtue, best feign'd chastity,
 And in the end turns all his jealousies
 To his own scorn, that lady, I implore
 It may be lawful not to praise, but even adore.¹⁸⁶

Emilia's outburst in Othello echoes his:

I do think it is their husbands' faults
 If wives do fall: say, that they slack their duties,
 And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
 Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
 Throwing restraint upon us: or say they strike us,
 Or scant our former having in despite,
 Why, we have galls: and though we have some grace,
 Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know,
 Their wives have sense like them: they see, and smell,
 And have their palates both for sweet, and sour,
 As husbands have. What is it that they do,
 When they change us for others? Is it sport?
 I think it is: and doth affection breed it?
 I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
 It is so too. And have we not affections?
 Desires for sport? and frailty, as men have?
 Then let them use us well: else let them know,
 The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Marston, The Fawn, IV.i. 592.

¹⁸⁷ Othello, IV.iii. 86.

Desdemona's submission is moving because it is sustained in the face of a right to rebel.

The dramatists' rejection of the medieval concept of female carnality allows them to explore the motives and inducements which make a woman choose an irregular life instead of the norm of chaste marriage. Fallen women are viewed as individuals, the nature of whose temptations is worth analysing. The outcome is a plea against the intolerance and hypocrisy of a society which rejects the repentant sinner, and persists in allowing men a licence that it denies to women. The dramatists follow the Puritans in attacking adultery as a social evil whose remedy lies in the building-up of good relations between man and wife; husbands share, with seducers, in the guilt of the adulteress. Moreover, this unromantic attitude to illicit passion, and to the woman who inspires it, shows the dramatists' assimilation of Humanist values.

CHAPTER VII

SHAKESPEARE'S DEFENCE OF WOMEN

Coleridge claims that:

No one can understand Shakespeare's superiority fully until he has ascertained, by comparison, all that which he possessed in common with several other great dramatists of his age, and has then calculated the surplus which is entirely Shakespeare's own.¹

Shakespeare, like his contemporaries, finds the raw material for his treatment of women in the attitudes evolving in his own society. He shares their Puritan commitment to the equality of man and wife, their Humanist distrust of idolatrous romanticism, and their concern - deeper and more widely developed - for women as individuals. His women, however, unlike theirs - with the exception of Mistress Quickly, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, and Doll Tearsheet - are aristocratic, like Lyly's. They ally themselves with the Humanist ideal of the vital, brilliant, intellectually vigorous woman, exemplified in many of the ladies in Elizabeth's Court.²

Superficially some of his heroines' characteristics also link him with Lyly - their wit and vivacity, their dilemmas in disguise, their active wooing. But the world in which they move

¹ Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with an introduction by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1884), p. 80.

² Mrs. Jameson, Shakespeare's Heroines (London: J. M. Dent & Co, 1901), p. 41, states that: "Shakespeare has exhibited in Beatrice a spirited and faithful portrait of the fine lady of his own time. The deportment, language, manners and allusions, are those of a particular class in a particular age."

is remote from Lyly's world. Shakespeare's vital relationship with the variegated life of his audience is reflected in the many-levelled, complex reconciliation of conflicting attitudes and ways of being in his comedy. By comparison the world of Lyly's comedy is linear, of the Court and for the Court, depending on the presence of the Court audience for its completion.³ Lyly lacks the ceaseless counterpointing of different attitudes to women, to love and marriage, which contributes to the fascination of Shakespearean comedy. Lyly balances the conventions of romance and of misogyny uncritically; they are a filigree setting for his characters' formal movements. But they are never put to the test by juxtaposition with realistic characters experiencing complicated emotions.

Shakespeare's opposition to attitudes that are damaging to women is not, like that of most of his contemporaries, an almost doctrinaire routing of injustice and illogicality; it grows out of a compassionate and sympathetic reverence for individuality, and the individual's capacity for feeling deeply. He discredits both the prejudices and the ideals which impose limits on men and women's integrity towards each other, and understanding of each other's - and their own - nature. This is the key to his treatment of misogynists, of women who woo, and of the romantic conventions repudiated by the Humanists.

The social prejudice that women must marry but men are free to choose may stem initially from the economic dependence of women; whatever its origin, its result is a licence issued by

³ Hunter, John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier, pp. 307-8, 346, 348.

society to bachelors to boast their liberty with impunity whereas a spinster is stigmatised with failure, and if she shows the same spirit accused of sour grapes. It is significant that there is no word in the English language parallel in meaning to misogyny.

Shakespeare draws three different types of men who boast immunity to women. The first is the young man who assumes a misogynist pose, and Shakespeare's exposing of him is in proportion to the extremeness of the pose. The most interesting example is Benedick, vowing never to commit himself to marriage:

That a woman conceived me, I thank her: that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none: and the fine is - for the which I may go the finer - I will live and die a bachelor.⁴

He protests a failure to understand the man who can fall in love after scoffing at it in others:

I do much wonder, that one man seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviours to love, will after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love. And such a man is Claudio.⁵

But Benedick's saving grace is his self-awareness; to some extent he is conscious of his role as a poseur: when Claudio asks for his approbation of Hero in the first scene of the play, he replies:

Do you question me as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgement? or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?⁶

Even in the midst of his scorn for the transfigured Claudio a moment

⁴Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing, ed. by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), I.i.225.

⁵Ibid., II.iii.7.

⁶Ibid., I.i.159.

of doubt touches him - is he really so different from other men?
 "May I be so converted, and see with these eyes? I cannot tell -
 I think not." His boast of immunity is to some extent a self-
 conscious enjoyment of a part, and when he discovers that this is
 no longer an appropriate role, he turns all his spirit to a defence
 of the new one. His conversion he sees as a moral issue:

I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud.
 Happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them
 to mending.

He determines to face his friends' raillery with confident conviction
 in a newly-acquired self-knowledge, reinforced by the dictates of
 social conscience:

I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit
 broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage:
 but doth not the appetite alter? a man loves the meat in his
 youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and
 sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from
 the career of his humour? No - the world must be peopled.
 When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live
 till I were married.⁷

In this play it could be argued that, as Beatrice adopts equally the
 pose of defiance of men, Benedick is not a simple case of the down-
 fall of the misogynist; Beatrice and Benedick find each other through
 discarding their own posturing. The conclusion of the play is
 egalitarian: "For man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion."⁸
 Benedick is too aware of his pose for Shakespeare to treat him
 severely. But in other plays his ridicule of the boastful misogynist
 is unequivocal.

Love's Labour's Lost deals with four young men who
 abjure the society of women in order to devote themselves to study,
 only to fall in love with the first women who cross their path.
 Berowne, the sanest of them, demurs momentarily at the strictness

⁷ Ibid., II.iii.21, 223, 229.

⁸ Ibid., V.iv.106.

of the vows, although the proposed abstinent diet seems to strike him quite as strongly as any enforced separation from women:

There are other strict observances;
As not to see a woman in that term,
Which I hope well is not enrolled there:
And one day in a week to touch no food
And but one meal on every day beside.⁹

Nevertheless he agrees to abide by the conditions and is mortified by his own defection, especially as the strength of his armour against Cupid had been a matter of pride:

I, that have been love's whip;
A very beadle to a humorous sigh;
A critic, nay a night-watch constable,
A domineering pedant o'er the boy,
Than whom no mortal so magnificent!

He cannot bear to think that so imperfect a creature as a woman should have wrought this havoc in a man of his sense:

What! I love! I sue! I seek a wife!
A woman that is like a German clock
Still a-repairing, ever out of frame.

Worse than everything his vanity is humbled by the knowledge that his subjection has been accomplished by no fair beauty, but the dark lady, the least winsome of them all - this is indeed Cupid's revenge:

A whitely wanton with a velvet brow,
With two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes;
.
. . . Go to; it is a plague
That Cupid will impose for my neglect
Of his almighty dreadful little might.¹⁰

But his fall, and that of his friends, brings him first to an unwilling self-knowledge, and secondly to a discovery of the folly of any man's

⁹ Love's Labour's Lost, I.i. 36.

¹⁰ Ibid., III.i. 171, 186, 193.

attempts to cut himself off from women's society. This misogynist turns into an eloquent defender of the educative influence of women:

For when would you, my lord, or you, or you,
Have found the ground of study's excellence
Without the beauty of a woman's face?
From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
They are the ground, the books, the academes,
From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire.¹¹

Whether or not this is Shakespeare's judgment on monastic ideals, it is a judgment that would have rejoiced the hearts of More and Erasmus. The pose of misogyny is exposed - men need women at least as much as women need men.

The second type of misogynist attacked by Shakespeare involves himself in a more oblique rejection of women. Malvolio is punished for his precision's disapproval of the good things of life by indulging an overweening fantasy about Olivia's supposed passion for him, and making a fool of himself in cross-garters. The hypocrisy of the "precise" Angelo, the "man whose blood / Is very snow-broth,"¹² condemning the precipitate love of Claudio for Julietta but himself yielding to a temptation of greater magnitude, is exposed mercilessly and rewarded with the humiliation of the bed-trick, and the poetic justice of union with the woman he had jilted. Admittedly in both cases the motivating force is not primarily a boast of immunity to women but a flaunting of superiority to the natural impulses of other men. In so far as such an attitude demands a rejection of women, Shakespeare's judgment on these characters defends women.

His treatment of the third type is more directly feminist;

¹¹ Ibid., IV.iii.296.

¹² Measure for Measure, I.iii.50, I.iv.57.

he is intolerant of the young gallant who spurns the love offered him by a lady. Although Bertram in All's Well That Ends Well is the most striking example, the situation is paralleled in Angelo's rejection of Mariana, and Demetrius' scorn of Helena in A Midsummer-Night's Dream. Both the last two are guilty of broken faith as well as ungentle behaviour and it is significant that the lady is pitied, not censured, for her unrequited passion. Oberon tells Puck that "a sweet Athenian lady is in love / With a disdainful youth,"¹³ and his impulse to help her, after a few miscarriages of plan, ends in a satisfactory restoring of Demetrius to his first love, with an admission of his perverted appetites in ever straying from her:

But, like in sickness, did I loathe this food,
But, as in health, come to my natural taste.¹⁴

Bertram is more savagely treated, because his refusal to love Helena derives not from a mere whim, but from a belief that virtue cannot be separated from inherited nobility, in spite of attempts to convince him of his wrong-headedness:

There's nothing here that is too good for him
But only she, and she deserves a lord
That twenty such rude boys might tend upon
And call her, hourly, mistress.¹⁵

He is brought to a painful knowledge of his own folly and vice through the trickery made feasible by his own lustfulness and the treachery of Parolles whom he trusted. Bertram is scourged for spurning a virtuous lady, whose suit Shakespeare obviously regards as just and which in no way impugns her modesty.

¹³ A Midsummer-Night's Dream, II.i.260.

¹⁴ Ibid., IV.i.172.

¹⁵ All's Well That Ends Well, III.ii.79.

Shakespeare undermines conventional ideas about female modesty as thoroughly as he undermines misogyny, because they inhibit women's freedom to recognize and communicate their own feelings. He opposes the assumption that in courtship female modesty is synonymous with passivity. His women woo without impudence or forwardness. Juliet's openness and artlessness in declaring her love for Romeo and even suggesting marriage is more modest than the simulated archness and artificial coyness of Cressida. Modesty is not just a question of observing certain social rules:

Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny
 What I have spoke: but farewell compliment!
 Dost thou love me?

 I should have been more strange, I must confess,
 But that thou overheardst, ere I was ware,
 My true-love passion.¹⁶

Miranda asks Ferdinand: "Do you love me?" before he asks her. Although she is not educated in the conventions of courtship, since she has never known other women, she instinctively shies away from archness or timidity as a form of dissembling:

Hence, bashful cunning!
 And prompt me plain and holy innocence!
 I am your wife if you will marry me! ¹⁷

It is often forgotten that Desdemona, sometimes accused of a lack of spirit, was not a merely passive recipient of Othello's suit.

She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
 That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,
 And bade me, if I had a friend that lov'd her,
 I should but teach him how to tell my story,
 And that would woo her.

¹⁶ Romeo and Juliet, II.ii.88.

¹⁷ Shakespeare, The Tempest, ed. by Frank Kermode, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1954), III.1.81.

Brabantio is obliged to drop his accusations of witchcraft:

If she confess that she was half the wooer,
Destruction light on me, if my bad blame
Light on the man! 18

The comic heroines are equally active in pursuing their own happiness, and their rejection of a purely passive role goes hand in hand with their assumption of a male disguise. Viola's immediate concern when shipwrecked on the shore of Illyria is to find out if Orsino is still single:

Viola : I have heard my father name him.
He was a bachelor then.
Captain : And so is now, or was so very late. 19

Although her first impulse is to serve Olivia, she happily determines to serve the Duke instead. Disguise enables her to woo obliquely, but it is none the less a wooing:

My father had a daughter loved a man,
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship, 20

and Orsino is quick to recognize it as such when the disguise is penetrated:

Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me
.
. . . Give me thy hand,
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds. 21

Yet Viola's active part in arranging her own destiny never challenges either her modesty or her femininity. The same is true of Silvia's device for wooing Valentine in The Two Gentlemen of Verona: she commissions him to write a letter to one she loves,

¹⁸ Othello, I.iii.162, 176.

¹⁹ Twelfth Night, I.ii.27.

²⁰ Ibid., II.iv.107.

²¹ Ibid., V.i.266.

and when he delivers it to her, gives it back with the words:

You writ them, sir, at my request;
But I will none of them; they are for you;
I would have had them writ more movingly.²²

Valentine is somewhat slow to take the hint, but fortunately has Speed to prompt him. In fact Shakespeare is consistently charitable and compassionate to the trials of wooing ladies. Even Olivia, courting disaster by falling in love with Cesario, eventually finds a more complete man to woo with impunity:

If you mean well,
Now go with me and with this holy man
Into the chantry by: there, before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith.²³

Her conduct may seem capricious, but it is not immodest.

It is Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, however, who evinces the keenest sense of the conflict between the claims of conventional rules for feminine modesty, and the inclinations dictated by an honest love. When Lucetta brings her a letter from Proteus she refuses to look at it, only to feel pangs of regret: "And yet I would I had o'erlook'd the letter." Lucetta gives her another chance, but another fit of untimely modesty makes her tear it up without reading it, only to try and piece it together afterwards:

Be calm, good wind, blow not a word away,
Till I have found each letter in the letter.²⁴

But her love and her fears for Proteus' constancy are stronger than her apprehension of seeming immodest in the eyes of the

²² The Two Gentlemen of Verona, II.i.122.

²³ Twelfth Night, IV.iii.22.

²⁴ The Two Gentlemen of Verona, I.ii.50, 119.

world, and she determines to disguise herself and follow him.

True modesty is in the mind, not in outward forms:

It is the lesser blot, modesty finds,
Women to change their shapes than men their minds.²⁵

Shakespeare's attack on stereotyped attitudes to women is nowhere more marked than in this undermining of the assumption that women must be the passive receivers of courtship, and that active pursuit of the beloved is immodest and unwomanly. He points out the inconsistency of the belief that a virtue as elusive as modesty can be confined within a set of regulations.

The strongest assertion of the active principle which is as much women's right as men's, is Helena's in All's Well That Ends Well:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven; the fated sky
Gives us free scope; only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.

Helplessness and defeatism in the face of rejection are too negative to masquerade as modesty. The woman who is not loved must do something about it:

Who ever strove
To show her merit that did miss her love? ²⁶

Helena is Shakespeare's most fully-drawn portrait of a woman of high intelligence and moral awareness undertaking systematically the management of her own love affair. Yet though she is far from isolated among Shakespeare's women as an example of the active heroine, the feminist implications of her role have been too strong to be easily digested by critics who seem not to have noticed the

²⁵ Ibid., V.iv.106.

²⁶ All's Well That Ends Well, I.i.212, 222.

radicalism of some of her fellows. Hazlitt is full of praise, although her situation is a delicate one:

She is placed in circumstances of the most critical kind, and has to court her husband both as a virgin and a wife: yet the most scrupulous nicety of female modesty is not once violated;²⁷

but Coleridge is not convinced: "It must be confessed that her character is not very delicate, and it required all Shakespeare's consummate skill to interest us for her;"²⁸ Mary Coleridge, writing in the later part of the nineteenth century, seems to find Helena's forthrightness unique among Shakespeare's women: "She may be reckoned as one of the few women who have ever proposed for men and yet kept their charm."²⁹ For Shaw the play is too much like feminist propaganda:

We scent among them an anticipation of the crudest side of Ibsen's polemics on the Woman Question, as in All's Well that Ends Well, where the man cuts as meanly selfish a figure beside his enlightened lady doctor wife as Helmer beside Nora.³⁰

Yet in Helena's character and situation Shakespeare has only developed more fully the opposition to conventional preconceptions about womanly behaviour in courtship which is apparent in as early

²⁷ William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespear's Plays (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1906), p. 220.

²⁸ Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 217.

²⁹ Mary Coleridge, source unidentified, quoted in George Gordon, Shakespearian Comedy and Other Studies (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 30. George Eliot, however, notices that women take the initiative in Shakespeare: "It is remarkable that Shakspeare's women almost always make love, in opposition to the conventional notion of what is fitting for woman." George Eliot Commonplace Book, quoted in Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 146.

³⁰ Bernard Shaw, "Better than Shakespear," in Plays & Players, selected by A. C. Ward (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 153.

a play as The Two Gentlemen of Verona and as mature a work as Othello.

Approval of women's wooing undermines the conventions of courtly love; the lady, no longer worshipped and sued to from afar,³¹ is an active and fallible being deserving respect or contempt on equal terms with men. It has been seen that, for the Humanists, the rejection of the ideals of medieval romance was as necessary as the repudiation of medieval satire for raising respect for women. Shakespeare retains what is genuine in romantic love while exposing its more extravagant and artificial manifestations. He is aware of the ease with which idealisation of women can turn into disappointed abuse when the beloved proves that she is only human. Worship distorts a man's view of woman and thus limits his feelings for her; she has as much right as a man to be judged as a creature in whom the mingled yarn, good and evil, is inextricably woven. The lovers in Shakespeare who indulge in romantic excess come to a clearer understanding of their own nature, the nature of love, and the nature of the beloved.

This is the point of Romeo's passion for Rosaline. He is playing the part of the conventional melancholy lover, unable to eat or sleep, abhorring society, and fascinated by his own emotions even more than by his lady. His love is literary, posturing and self-indulgent, requiring to be nourished by a self-conscious divorce from the world. It is punctured not only by Mercutio's cynicism:

Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in.
Laura to his lady was a kitchen wench - marry, she had a

³¹ Miranda's appeal to Ferdinand in The Tempest, III.i.83, inverts the romantic convention:

I am your wife if you will marry me;
If not, I'll die your maid: to be your fellow
You may deny me; but I'll be your servant
Whether you will or no.

better love to be-rhyme her! - Dido a dowdy, Cleopatra a gipsy, Helen and Hero hildings and harlots, Thisbe a gray eye or so, but not to the purpose, ³²

but by Romeo's own lapses into the substantial everyday world; he cannot always sustain his own apostrophising:

Alas that Love, whose view is muffled still,
Should without eyes see pathways to his will!
Where shall we dine? ³³

By showing an artificial passion Shakespeare highlights the new seriousness and tenderness in Romeo's feeling for Juliet. He is incapable of jesting with Mercutio about his love for her: "He jests at scars that never felt a wound." ³⁴

Shakespeare's distrust of romantic poses is developed more fully in Much Ado About Nothing, where the two couples - Hero and Claudio, and Beatrice and Benedick - represent an antithesis of romance and anti-romance. Shakespeare argues that the trappings of romantic love are worthless unless founded on more solid attributes - loyalty, kindness, self-knowledge and knowledge of the loved one's character. The counterpart of Claudio's extravagant protestations of love for Hero is the cruel celerity of his belief in her disgrace, and his willingness to denigrate her in public; he deserves Beatrice's contempt and indignation:

Is a' not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman? O that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands, and then with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour - O God that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place. ³⁵

³² Romeo and Juliet, II.iv.38.

³³ Ibid., I.i.170.

³⁴ Ibid., II.ii.1.

³⁵ Much Ado About Nothing, IV.i.300.

The genuine, equal love of Beatrice and Benedick is unromantic even in its inception - manoeuvred not by Cupid but by a human trick. Both lovers undercut conventional romance throughout, and submit to their union protesting their indifference to the last. Benedick says: "Come, I will have thee - but by this light I take thee for pity," and Beatrice retorts: "By this good day I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a great consumption."³⁶ The extravagant romantic idealism of Claudio hides a lack of real feeling for Hero or understanding of her nature - he only begins to feel genuinely when he thinks his cruelty has killed her. The real love of Beatrice and Benedick exists independent of romantic convention and is based on equal loyalties and affection.

A symptom of Benedick's non-conformity to the image of the romantic lover is his failure to versify. The conventions of romance allowed the lover to luxuriate in poetic catharsis. In Love's Labour's Lost Don Armado, in a sub-plot echoing the main theme, decides to turn sonneteer for Jacquenetta. Orlando's verses please Arden. Slender in The Merry Wives of Windsor sighs: "I had rather than forty shillings I had my Book of Songs and Sonnets here."³⁷ But deficiency in poetry suggests sincerity. Benedick asserts:

Leander the good swimmer, Troilus the first employer of pandars, and a whole bookful of these quondam carpet-mongers, whose names yet run smoothly in the even road of a blank verse, why, they were never so truly turned over and over as my poor self, in love. Marry, I cannot show it in rhyme - I was not born under a rhyming planet, nor I cannot woo in festival terms.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., V.iv. 92, 94.

³⁷ The Merry Wives of Windsor, I.i. 184.

³⁸ Much Ado About Nothing, V.ii. 30.

Henry V warns Katherine: "Marry, if you would put me to verses, or to dance for your sake Kate, why you undid me."³⁹ The best explanation of this distrust of poetry as a manifestation of love occurs in a little dialogue between Touchstone and Audrey:

Audrey : I do not know what 'poetical' is: is it honest in deed and word? is it a true thing?
Touchstone : No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning; and lovers are given to poetry; and what they swear in poetry it may be said as lovers they do feign.⁴⁰

A recognition of the distortions of idolatrous passion provides a clue to the ending of Love's Labour's Lost. Berowne is conscious of the unreality of romantic love earlier in the play. His comment on Longaville's adulatory sonnet: "My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love," is:

This is the liver vein, which makes flesh a deity;
 A green goose a goddess; pure, pure idolatry.
 God amend us, God amend! we are much out o' th' way.

and when Dumain enters, crying: "O most divine Kate!" Berowne echoes him with: "O most profane coxcomb!"⁴¹ Berowne may be more clear-sighted for his friends than for himself but his awareness of the disproportion and near blasphemy of worshipping a woman in these terms anticipates the reassertion of the values of the real world at the end of the play. It is the women themselves who pass judgement on the quality of their suitors' love:

We have receiv'd your letters full of love;
 Your favours, the ambassadors of love;
 And in our maiden council, rated them
 At courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy,

³⁹ King Henry V, ed. by J. H. Walter, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1954), V.ii.134.

⁴⁰ As You Like It, III.iii.15.

⁴¹ Love's Labour's Lost, IV.iii.63, 72, 81, 82.

As bombast and as lining to the time.
 But more devout than this in our respects
 Have we not been; and therefore met your loves
 In their own fashion, like a merriment.

The young men are discomfitted by such a casual interpretation;
 when they protest their seriousness:

Now, at the latest minute of the hour,
 Grant us your loves,

the answer is a further reminder of the unreality of romantic attitudes:

A time, methinks, too short
 To make a world-without-end bargain in.

Love is not just pageantry and sonnet-writing, but must stand the tests of hardship and of time. Romance is appropriate in a play-world; love must survive beyond the play.

Berowne : Our wooing doth not end like an old play;
 Jack hath not Jill: these ladies' courtesy
 Might well have made our sport a comedy.

King : Come, sir, it wants a twelvemonth and a day,
 And then 'twill end.

Berowne : That's too long for a play.⁴²

The young men progress from the artificiality of academia to the artificiality of romance. In both cases it is women who shatter the idyll and oblige them to return to a world of human feelings and human hardships where women are as much human beings as men, deserving neither rejection nor idolatry.

The ladies in Love's Labour's Lost are not the only women to deflate the romantic lover's ecstasy. Shakespeare often makes women more incisive critics of romantic poses than men. Although their fencing with the romantic lover seems light-hearted, their thrusts often have an edge of truth. Vives reflects that: "Love

⁴²Ibid., V.ii.767, 777, 778, 864.

doth pain sometimes, but it never slayeth,"⁴³ and Rosalind echoes him:

The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love-cause: Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club, yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love: Leander, he would have lived many a fair year, though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot midsummer night; for, good youth, he went forth to wash him in the Hellespont and being taken with the cramp was drowned, and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it was 'Hero of Sestos.' But these are all lies. Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.⁴⁴

She is sceptical about love's durability. Orlando vows to love Rosalind, once she is his, "for ever and a day." She corrects him:

Say 'a day' without the 'ever' . . . No, no, Orlando, men are April when they woo, December when they wed; maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives.⁴⁵

Beatrice instructs Hero:

Wooing, wedding, and repenting, is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinque-pace: the first suit is hot and hasty like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding mannerly-modest, as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes Repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinque-pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.⁴⁶

Love in Shakespearean comedy is not softened by the serene timelessness of medieval romance, but made more poignant by the consciousness of mutability: "What is love, 'tis not hereafter,"

⁴³ Above, p. 46.

⁴⁴ As You Like It, IV.i. 90. Cf. King Henry V, V.ii. 152: "I speak to thee plain soldier: if thou canst love me for this, take me; if not, to say to thee that I shall die, is true; but for thy love, by the Lord, no; yet I love thee too."

⁴⁵ As You Like It, IV.i. 140, 141.

⁴⁶ Much Ado About Nothing, II.i. 65.

"Youth's a stuff will not endure."⁴⁷ Women, who bear children,
and whose beauty age must wither,

Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
So aged as this seems,⁴⁸

challenge romanticism with the facts of the physical world. Man at the last count, whatever his protestations, is but "a piece of valiant dust," "a clod of wayward marl."⁴⁹ In Love's Labour's Lost death, sickness, hardship, the trials of time, are external, shattering the play-world. In As You Like It they inform the whole feeling and philosophy of the play. Life is but a flower, "Love is crownéd with the prime," and "Time is the old justice"⁵⁰ who tries all. Rosalind, fathom deep in love, is as critical of romance as the ladies in Love's Labour's Lost.

Shakespeare shows how the idolatry of the romantic lover denies individuality to his lady. The plight of Demetrius and Lysander in A Midsummer-Night's Dream bodies forth the romantic lover's worship of an ideal of beauty associated only arbitrarily with an actual person; both men turn from eulogizing Hermia to salute Helena: "Who will not change a raven for a dove?", "O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine."⁵¹ Their obliviousness of the particular qualities of the beloved is parodied in Titania's infatuation for Bottom: "Methought I was enamoured of an ass."⁵² The lover's rapturous particularity about his lady's

⁴⁷Twelfth Night, II.iii.49, 54.

⁴⁸The Winter's Tale, V.iii.28.

⁴⁹Much Ado About Nothing, II.i.56, 57.

⁵⁰As You Like It, V.iii.29, 35, IV.i.194.

⁵¹A Midsummer-Night's Dream, II.ii.122, III.ii.137.

⁵²Ibid., IV.i.76.

beauty, but confusion about which particular lady he loves:

To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
 Crystal is muddy. O, how ripe in show
 Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!
 That pure congealed white, high Taurus' snow,
 Fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow,
 When thou hold'st up thy hand. O let me kiss
 This princess of pure white, this seal of bliss, ⁵³

finds its mirror-image in the transports of Pyramus and Thisbe:

These lily lips,
 This cherry nose,
 These yellow cowslip cheeks,
 Are gone, are gone:
 Lovers, make moan:
 His eyes were green as leeks. ⁵⁴

Although idolatry may lead the lover to undervalue his lady as a human being - as with Claudio and Hero - it may result in over-valuing her. Rosalind chides Silvius for worshipping Phoebe:

Come, come, you are a fool,
 And turned into the extremity of love.
 I saw her hand - she has a leathern hand,
 A freestone-coloured hand: I verily did think
 That her old gloves were on, but 'twas her hands.

Exposing Phoebe's falsehood, she demands: "Wilt thou love such a woman? What, to make thee an instrument and play false strains upon thee!" ⁵⁵ To Phoebe she exclaims:

Who might be your mother,
 That you insult, exult, and all at once,
 Over the wretched? What though you have no beauty -

 Must you be therefore proud and pitiless?

She admonishes her:

⁵³ Ibid., III.ii.138.

⁵⁴ Ibid., V.i.329.

⁵⁵ As You Like It, IV.iii.22, 67.

But mistress, know yourself - down on your knees,
 And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love;
 For I must tell you friendly in your ear,
 Sell when you can - you are not for all markets.⁵⁶

- a verdict on the cult of remoteness in the courtly lady.

In Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare shows the tragic consequences entailed in a lover's blindness to his lady's human qualities. Hector's argument against retaining Helen fits Troilus' case:

'Tis mad idolatry
 To make the service greater than the god;
 And the will dotes that is attributive
 To what infectiously itself affects,
 Without some image of th'affected merit.⁵⁷

The love-scene between Troilus and Cressida evinces a ludicrous juxtaposition of his lyricism:

This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will is
 infinite, and the execution confined; that the desire is
 boundless and the act a slave to limit,

with her literalness:

They say all lovers swear more performance than they
 are able.⁵⁸

Cressida's falseness forces Troilus to recognize her as an individual to be judged by the same criterion as other people: "To her own worth / She shall be prized."⁵⁹

In Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare suspends his own judgments on romantic love; Cleopatra's individuality is not blurred, but made more distinct by the cross-currents of idolatry

⁵⁶ Ibid., III.v.35, 57.

⁵⁷ Troilus and Cressida, II.ii.56.

⁵⁸ Ibid., III.ii.79, 83.

⁵⁹ Ibid., IV.iv.133.

and cynicism which continuously wash against her. Antony loses his identity in loving her, but she finds hers. The contradictions inherent in romanticism both express and fulfil the contradictions in her nature. Her being embraces opposing excesses; the gipsy, strumpet, "ribaudred nag of Egypt," "triple-turn'd whore" fulfils half of a Janus-faced image. Looked at in another way, she is a "lass unparallel'd," the "enchanting queen," ready to "catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace," "the serpent of old Nile" whom age cannot wither, beguiling the air to pay her homage.⁶⁰

Shakespeare shows how prejudices and ideals about women in general damage men and women equally by restricting their knowledge of themselves and of each other. He explores femininity not as a social or religious concept, but as an elusive quality manifested differently in different women. The precepts of Puritanism and Humanism are realised in human terms. To investigate their influence in the plays of his contemporaries is to see how far Shakespeare progresses beyond his fellow-playwrights:

They are indeed the scale by which we can best ascend to the true knowledge and love of him. Our admiration of them does not lessen our relish for him: but, on the contrary, increases and confirms it.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Antony and Cleopatra, I.i.10, 13, III.x.10, IV.xii.13, V.ii.315, I.ii.125, V.ii.345, I.v.25, II.ii.216.

⁶¹ William Hazlitt, Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth, "General View of the Subject," in Shakespeare Criticism: A Selection, with an introduction by D. Nichol Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 322.

CONCLUSION

(Attitudes to women in Jacobean drama bear a stronger and more precise relation to attitudes current in Jacobean society than has ever been realised) An analysis of the dramatists' ideas about women through a charting of their origins - intellectual and theological, social, and literary - casts light on their moral judgments in a variety of fields. By plotting the connection between the drama and the outside world in regard to attitudes to women, this investigation tries to demonstrate in specific terms one element in the intense intellectual and imaginative activity of Jacobean dramatists.

Puritan and Humanist ideas about women influence both the dramatists' general approach to relations between the sexes, and their treatment of specific issues involving women. At first glance this is surprising, considering the antagonism between the Puritans and the theatre, and also considering the incidence of conventional satire of women in the plays.

It was not, however, until roughly 1625 that the acrimony between the dramatists and the main body of Puritan opinion gained sufficient impetus for moderate supporters of Puritanism - the bulk of middle-class citizens - to stop going to the theatre. The dramatists confine their satire, during the Jacobean period, to sectarianism - the "shriveled manifestation of the spirit of Puritanism"¹ - for the good reason that both they and their audience are sympathetic to the ideals and assumptions inherent in Puritanism as a philosophy and way of life. (The common ground between dramatists and Puritan preachers in their attitudes to women is

¹Thompson, The Controversy between the Puritans and the Stage, p. 9.

one - among many - of the affinities between the theatre and the pulpit.)

(Puritanism embraces both the principles of chaste marriage expounded by the Protestant reformers, and the humanitarian-concern for the position of women apparent in the writings of Erasmus, Vives, More and Ascham) The frequency with which writers of Puritan domestic conduct books refer to Erasmus by name, and reproduce passages from both his writings and Vives', evinces their recognition of Humanist authority for their own attitudes to women.

Thus the dramatists, in garnering their ideas about women from these two main streams of liberal thinking about women, are in touch with the most fertile intellectual currents of their own time.

In the case of Humanism, its liberating influence on English intellectual and moral life needs no demonstration. The influence of the Puritans on the same spheres, however, has always been the subject of controversy. Matthew Arnold talks of the "provincialism of the English Puritans,"² and laments how "our Puritans, ancient and modern, . . . have developed one side of their humanity at the expense of all others, and have become incomplete and mutilated men in consequence." He explains away Milton as a man whose moral completeness was the result of his being "trained within the pale of the Establishment."³ Milton's opponents might well have commented that "thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." Santayana, sensitive to the religious imagination, nevertheless announces:

² Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, ed. by J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 14.

³ Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

In Shakespeare's time and country, to be religious already began to mean to be Puritanical; and in the divorce between the fullness of life on the one hand and the depth and unity of faith on the other, there could be no doubt to which side a man of imaginative instincts would attach himself.⁴

More modern critics and historians of ideas call it "an age of great theological excitement,"⁵ and claim that "English Puritanism . . . was a deepening and broadening by natural and steady growth of the nation's moral nature."⁶

(Puritan attitudes to women at least, evince liberal ideals, and initiate humanitarian practices. The dramatists are challenged to ask new questions about women's nature, and made aware of conflicting interests with regard to women's position in the home and in society.)

Moreover, attitudes to women in society are in a state of flux. Foreigners comment on the liberty of married women, and conservatives deplore it, seeing in women's independent support of Puritan sects, in their carefree social life, and in the masculine posturing of some women, a threat - made more real by changes in the social structure - to domestic order and even civil obedience. The articulate claim of a few militant women to equality with men suggests a developing social awareness in women themselves.

Women are also quick to resent the aspersions cast on their sex generally by satirists perpetuating a worn-out medieval convention of diatribe against female frailty. Once a living art-form, this stereotyped satire on women is gradually absorbed into

⁴ George Santayana, "The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare" Selected Critical Writings of George Santayana, ed. by Norman Henfrey, I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 69.

⁵ Frye, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine, p. 89.

⁶ Thompson, The Controversy between the Puritans and the Stage, p. 10.

the drama and is much in evidence in Jacobean plays. The dramatists exploit its topical vitality - women and their male supporters fly to defend themselves against satirists and even write a play in which the most prominent of them, Joseph Swetnam, is brought to justice and shamed.⁷ But the dramatists are selective in their use of stock satire, making it the badge of specific classes of character. Consequently its venom is directed away from women, and rebounds on the satirist himself. In this way the dramatists incorporate what is lively in the tradition into the plays without jeopardising their allegiance to Puritan attitudes to women.

An understanding of attitudes and assumptions relative to woman's nature and her position equips the critic to pass accurate judgments on the treatment of women in the drama, through his ability to gauge both the dramatist's intention, and the dramatist's integrity in adhering to it. The work of many critics suffers from vagueness and indifference to this aspect of the dramatist's ethical framework. One writer remarks:

How far Petruchio's behaviour had Shakespeare's approbation, how far Katherine's long and formal recantation in the last act represents Shakespeare's considered opinion on the proper relations between man and wife, are questions difficult to answer.⁸

But these are questions which must be answered if the play is to be taken seriously, rather than judged as a piece of knock-about farce interspersed with conventional romanticism. The same critic, after an arbitrary assertion about wife-beating, and a speculation on "the crude breath of social reality blowing for a moment into the fanciful and idealistic world of Shakespeare's comedy," assures

⁷ Swetnam the Woman-Hater Arraigned by Women, ed. by A. B. Grosart (Manchester: printed for the subscribers, 1880).

⁸ Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition, p. 74.

us that "these problems need not engage us deeply here."⁹ The same nonchalance characterises his judgment on Love's Labour's Lost: "Whether Shakespeare intended it or not, we feel - not happy to be bundled out of our enchanted circle of make-believe - that we are in the real, complex world of pain and mortality."¹⁰ But Shakespeare's intention is crucial to an understanding of the play. Another critic, commenting on Mistress Glister's exposing to Maria of the lechery of gallants, in The Family of Love, and on Lipsalve's satire on women, identifies Middleton's views on love, lust and women with those of the gallant;¹¹ the Jacobean dramatists' equation of particular attitudes to women with particular social groups escapes his notice. T. S. Eliot in an essay on Middleton, states that The Roaring Girl "more than any Elizabethan comedy realises a free and noble womanhood,"¹² but this is a twentieth century evaluation of Moll Cutpurse, the validity of which needs testing in the light of what seventeenth century women - and men - thought of as nobility and freedom in women. Eliot remains insensitive to the play's cautious and conformist conclusion.

The reluctance of literary critics and social and intellectual historians to trespass on each other's ground is particularly disastrous in relation to the (Jacobean period, when the drama is in such close contact with the social, intellectual and theological currents of the time.) Frye, analysing Shakespeare's assimilation of Protestant doctrine, justifies himself for not inquiring into Shakespeare's affinities with the Puritan preachers on the grounds that Haller's "studies of Puritanism . . . give us assurance that,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

¹¹ David L. Frost, The School of Shakespeare: The Influence of Shakespeare on English Drama 1600-42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 20-32.

¹² T. S. Eliot, "Thomas Middleton," Elizabethan Dramatists (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963), p. 93.

had there been demonstrable relations between what they [the preachers] said and what Shakespeare wrote, he would have found them."¹³ Louis B. Wright exaggerates the cynicism of the time about middle-class women through failing to compare the assertions of satirists with the dramatists' treatment of them. His chapter on the stage and the plays themselves adheres to the Polonius principle - "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral" - substituting classification for analysis.¹⁴ Literary critics falsify their investigations by attempting to explain everything in Jacobean drama by reference to purely literary developments. Pettet, commenting on the novel association of romantic love and marriage at the end of the sixteenth century, speculates:

This changed attitude towards marriage was probably connected with the intense spiritualisation of love in later romantic writing. Certainly we cannot account for it by any obvious change in society, where a love marriage was still extremely rare: 'Marriage was not otherwise regarded at the Court of Elizabeth or James than in the fourteenth century.' (Grierson, op. cit. p. 152).¹⁵

Casualness about cultural assumptions governing Jacobean drama, and in particular, (Shakespeare's plays, means that the independence and consciousness of equality with men which) characterises Shakespeare's women, has been attributed with unquestioning reverence to Shakespeare's genius for seeing human nature as it is, unfettered by transient social custom. There has been no attempt to investigate the attitudes which determine

¹³ Frye, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine, p. 11, n. 7.

¹⁴ Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, pp. 465-507, 603-654.

¹⁵ Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition, p. 17, n. 4. Pettet is referring to H. J. C. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century.

Shakespeare's treatment of women, or to relate them to ideas current in his own society, in order to assess the origins and significance of an approach to women so congenial to the modern way of thinking.

Puritan and Humanist ideals mould Shakespeare's thinking about the nature of woman through their challenging of the medieval assumption of female frailty; they shape his ideas about obedience and equality in marriage, about women's intellectual capacity, about celibacy, sexual passion, and the double standard. His plays show women challenging, and challenged by, male stereotypes about them. An analysis of Shakespeare's attitudes to conventional satire on women illuminates his standpoint with regard to characters as diverse as Hamlet, Iago, Leontes and Posthumus.¹⁶ Shakespeare breaks down the different components in misogyny and conventional ideas about female modesty, and exposes the false assumptions in social prejudice. His women's modesty is not dependent on feminine dress, although it is noticeable that he takes advantage of the fact that Beatrice never disguises herself, and therefore needs no defence against charges of immodesty, to equip her with a rapier wit which reduces men to silence.

Shakespeare shares Humanist ideas about the romantic lover's idolatry; it is absurd to analyse his criticism of romantic conventions independent of his creation of feminine characters: his analysis of women's closer contact with the physical world, and of the human emotions and weaknesses which make the cult of the lady worshipped from afar seem a literary anachronism.

¹⁶ G. K. Hunter, "The Last Tragic Heroes," Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies, Vol. VIII: Later Shakespeare (London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1966), 26, remarks: "We are less interested in the 'redemption' of Leontes or Posthumus than in the complex of interests and attitudes inside which their redeemed lives will have to be accommodated." Both characters have to furnish themselves with radically different attitudes to women.

These ideas about women may be extracted from Shakespeare's plays without reference to the plays of his contemporaries. But it is only in comparison to contemporary drama that his breadth of vision and his power of organic imaginative creation out of assimilated ideas can be fully appreciated. His criticism of the romantic tradition is not a separable element in an ingeniously constructed whole, as is the case in one or two of Marston's plays, or even Jonson's, but is transmuted into a vision of the world and the people in it which undermines the basic assumptions of romanticism. The recurrent lascivious, impoverished courtier satirising women, but tapping them for money, despised and exposed in Jacobean drama, becomes Falstaff, making love simultaneously to Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, planning inroads on their husbands' wealth: "I will be cheaters to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me,"¹⁷ and reproached by a defrauded yet devoted Mistress Quickly:

Thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech the butcher's wife come in then and call me gossip Quickly? - coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar, telling us she had a good dish of prawns, whereby thou didst desire to eat some, whereby I told thee they were ill for a green wound? And didst thou not, when she was gone downstairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people, saying that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? I put thee now to thy book oath, deny it if thou canst.¹⁸

The city madam's fastidious speech becomes Lady Percy's city oath, boisterously berated by Hotspur:

¹⁷ The Merry Wives of Windsor, I.iii.68.

¹⁸ The Second Part of King Henry IV, ed. by A. R. Humphreys (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1966), II.i.88.

Not yours, in good sooth! Heart! you swear like a
 comfit-maker's wife - 'not you, in good sooth', and 'as true
 as I live', and 'as God shall mend me', and 'as sure as day' -
 And givest such sarcenet surety for thy oaths,
 As if thou never walk'st further than Finsbury.
 Swear me, Kate, like a lady as thou art,
 A good mouth-filling oath, and leave 'in sooth',
 And such protest of pepper-gingerbread,
 To velvet-guards and Sunday citizens.¹⁹

The plays about the adulterous woman culminate in Antony and Cleopatra, where Bacon's judgment "Wanton loue Corrupteth"²⁰ is both fulfilled in Antony, and magnificently evaded in Cleopatra.

The study of attitudes to women in Jacobean drama shows in the first place the creative stimulus afforded the dramatists by controversies and discussions about women outside the theatre; secondly the extent to which Puritan and Humanist influence on the drama in shaping liberal ideas about women has been underrated; and thirdly, that the modernity of Shakespeare's heroines derives from his close connection with the most radical thinking of his time about women's nature, their relation with men, and their place in society. With the Restoration women equal to men in wit, moral awareness and intellect are no longer recognized as their equals by society and the men around them. They are the play-things of the hour, necessary to improve the quality of men's lives, but obliged to face the fact that in the serious business of living their place is to dwindle into wives. The mentally robust, self-respecting woman envisaged by the Humanists, educated as her husband's equal, self-sufficient and articulate in a man's world without forfeiting her femininity, seeing marriage as a challenge offering the greatest spiritual and physical fulfilment in life, fades from the drama with the withering of Puritan idealism. The loss

¹⁹The First Part of the History of Henry IV, ed. by John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), III.i.247.

²⁰Francis Bacon, "Of Loue," Essays by Francis Bacon (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 41.

to the moral awareness of society is matched by a diminished range and vitality in the drama. Only the nineteenth century novel, born in a world of comparable conflicts about women, can compare with Jacobean drama in its range of enquiry about the nature of women, and its breadth of sympathy with the plight of individual women. Shakespeare's women are not remote from his own world, born of a genius ahead of his time, but creatures who embody attitudes and ideals current in contemporary society. These attitudes determine the treatment of women in Jacobean drama generally, but find their fullest human expression in Shakespeare's plays.

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